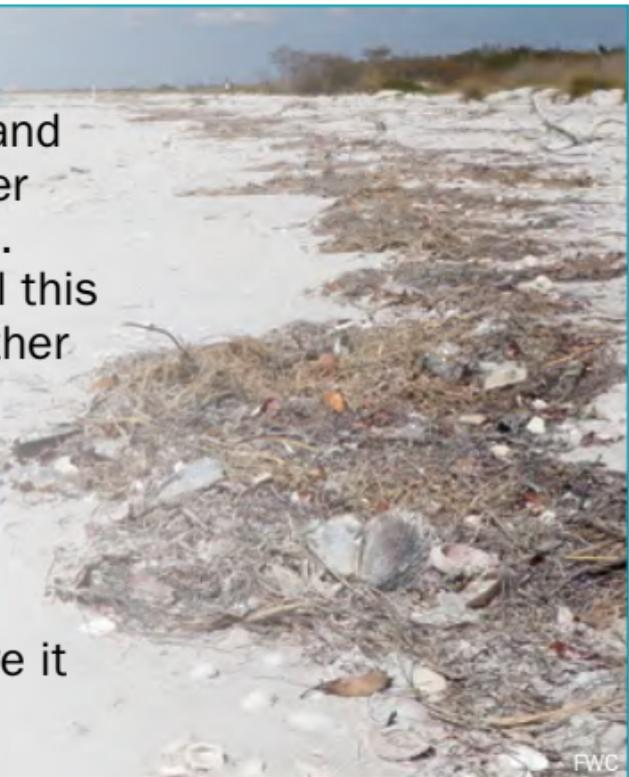


# Beach Wrack ID Guide



## What is beach wrack?

Anything washed ashore and found above the high water line is called beach wrack. Most people generally call this seaweed, but there are other interesting things in the wrack that help keep the beach alive and stable. The wrack serves as food and shelter for wildlife, and it is important to leave it on Florida beaches.





## How do I use this guide?

You can use this guide to go on a scavenger hunt — find and identify plants and animals found in beach wrack, and discover a wealth of natural treasures that wash in from the sea. However, there are a few items you should not touch or remove (indicated here by ). There are many other plants and animals that you may find in addition to those listed here, so keep looking!



## Macroalgae (Seaweed)



Sargassum



Graceful Redweed

### **Sargassum:**

Golden when fresh, turns dark brown on the beach; has many round air bladders that look like berries

**Fun Fact:** Sargassum drifts on Gulf and Atlantic currents and ends up in the Sargasso Sea in the center of an ocean-spanning vortex.

### **Graceful Redweed:**

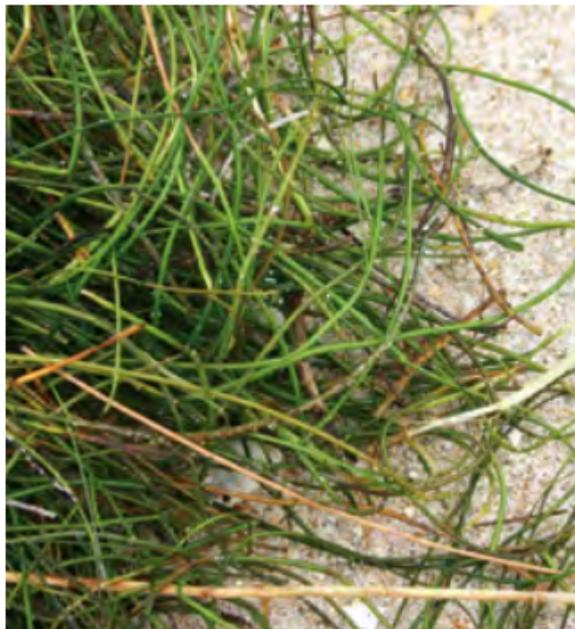
Greenish to bright red forked branches; quickly bleaches clear

**Fun Fact:** Red algae have a photosynthetic pigment that reflects red light and absorbs blue light, allowing them to live in deeper water than green plants.

# Seagrasses



Turtle Grass



Manatee Grass

### **Turtle Grass:**

Green or brown when dead; ribbon-like flat blades

**Fun Fact:** Turtle grass is the most common Caribbean seagrass and the largest Florida seagrass. It is also one of the few marine plants that has flowers.

### **Manatee Grass:**

Forms white tubules when dead; 1-2 in. long, less than 1/8 in. wide

**Fun Fact:** Manatee grass is the second most common seagrass in Florida waters and is a favorite food of its namesake, the manatee.

## Sea Beans



**Hamburger  
Bean**



**Sea  
Heart**



**Mangrove  
Propagule**

**Hamburger Bean:**

Plump disk with thick black band around the middle

**Fun Fact:**

Hamburger beans come from rainforest vines of the American tropics and the West Indies.

**Sea Heart:**

Circular or heart-shaped; glossy purple-brown or dark mahogany

**Fun Fact:**

Sea hearts come from the monkey ladder vine from the rainforests of Central and South America.

**Mangrove**

**Propagule:**

Long, cigar-shaped; green or brown

**Fun Fact:**

Propagules come from the red mangrove tree, which lives in saline areas of the American tropics.

# Sponges



**Golfball  
Sponge**



**Redbeard  
Sponge**



**Sheepswool  
Sponge**

**Golfball Sponge:**

Yellow to brown sphere with distinct pores

**Fun Fact:**

Sponges are simple animals that filter up to 10,000 times their own volume of seawater each day.

**Redbeard Sponge:**

Slim, velvety, red branches

**Fun Fact:**

Redbeard sponges are used in labs to study how separated cells can reassemble into a whole organism.

**Sheepswool Sponge:**

Soft, brown, classic bath sponge

**Fun Fact:**

Sheepswool sponges were commercially harvested in Florida from the late 19th century until the middle of the 20th century.

# Cnidarians



Sea  
Whip



Moon  
Jelly



Portuguese  
Man O' War

### **Sea Whip:**

Soft coral with whip-like branches; purple, red, orange, or yellow

**Fun Fact:** Soft corals are colonies of tiny polyps, each with 8 tentacles.

### **Moon Jelly:**

Large, clear, with pink, clover leaf shaped gland in the bell

**Fun Fact:** Like all cnidarians, moon jellies have stinging cells which cause a burning sensation when touched.



### **Portuguese Man O' War:**

Brilliant blue with pink-crested sail and trailing tentacles which can sting even when dead

**Warning:**  
DO NOT TOUCH!



## *Mollusks (Shells)*



**Heart  
Cockle**



**Pen  
Shell**



**Sunray  
Venus Clam**

**Heart Cockle:**

Large; cream with brown or tan in segments along its shell ribs

**Fun Fact:** Heart cockles, also known as giant cockles, can come from deep in the sea — sometimes up to 100 feet!

**Pen Shell:**

Very large black or brown shell with pearly interior

**Fun Fact:** Many living pen shells have pale, soft-bodied pen shrimp living inside.

**Sunray Venus Clam:**

Large, pearly smooth shells with radiating bands of color

**Fun Fact:** The sunray venus clam is eaten by gulls and is also used to make chowder.

# Arthropods



**Beach-  
hopper**



**White Beach  
Tiger Beetle**



**Ghost  
Crab**

**Beachhopper:**

Sand-colored, hump-backed, looks like a flea; bounces when the wrack is disturbed

**Fun Fact:**

Beachhoppers are not insects, and they do not bite.

**White Beach Tiger Beetle:**

pearly-colored; long legs; large eyes; makes short flights

**Fun Fact:** These beetles are insects that eat beachhoppers and other things in the wrack.

**Ghost Crab:**

Pale square body with yellowish legs; large eyestalks; can run fast

**Fun Fact:** Some ghost crabs can change colors to match their surroundings over the course of several hours.

## More Arthropods



**Blue  
Crab**



**Horseshoe  
Crab**



**Mole  
Crab**

### **Blue Crab:**

Greenish and blue; mostly discarded molts found; pointed projections on the sides; do not pick up if alive

**Fun Fact:** Blue crabs are swift predators that eat mollusks, fish and other crabs.



### **Horseshoe Crab:**

Large U-shaped head, pointed tail spine; mostly discarded molts found

### **Fun Fact:**

Horseshoe crabs have blue blood, which is harvested for medical use.

### **Mole Crab:**

1.5 inches, teardrop-shaped, mottled green-gray; tan above, white below

**Fun Fact:** Mole crabs are used as bait when fishing for whiting and pompano.

## *Echinoderms*



**Sand Dollar**



**Short-spined Urchin**

### **Sand Dollar:**

Brown and prickly when alive — can secrete a yellow liquid which will stain clothing and skin; should only be picked up when dead and bleached white

**Fun Fact:** Sand dollars, like other echinoderms, have tiny tube feet all over their bodies. Their notches and holes help them sink into the sand.

### **Short-spined Urchin:**

Leaves behind a shell called a “test” that is green when fresh and white when sun-bleached

**Fun Fact:** These urchins adorn themselves with bits of shell and algae — held on with their tube feet — which may help protect them from UV light.

# Chordates



Leathery Sea Squirt



Sea Pork

### **Leathery Sea Squirt:**

Looks like a wrinkled potato; has 4 lobes around a siphon that squirts when squeezed

**Fun Fact:** Sea squirts have a lot in common with humans, although it may not look like it. They have traits that we exhibit during early development, such as a rigid cartilage backbone, called a notochord.

### **Sea Pork:**

Rubbery, looks like salt pork; has a flattened side with several lobes; white, pink, yellow, green, red, purple

**Fun Fact:** Sea pork is actually a colony of tiny tunicate animals individually known as zooids. They are eaten by tulip snails, stingrays and sea turtles.

## Vertebrates



Mermaid's Purse



Sea Turtle Hatchling

### **Mermaid's Purse:**

Egg cases of sharks, skates and rays; black, with four thread-like extensions

**Fun Fact:** Egg cases that wash up on the beach are usually empty because the young have already hatched out. You can tell if the yolk and embryo are still inside by holding it up to the sunlight.

### **Sea Turtle Hatchling:**

Loggerheads, green turtles, and hawksbills

DO NOT pick up sea turtle hatchlings — they are protected, and it is illegal to disturb them! To report stranded hatchlings, call the FWC Wildlife Alert Number:  
888-404-FWCC

**Fun Fact:** Hatchlings emerge July-October.



## More Vertebrates — Shorebirds



Ruddy Turnstone



Sanderling

### **Ruddy Turnstone:**

Stocky with orange legs and dark, wedge-shaped bill; in winter, white below with brownish head, bib and back; when breeding, black and white head, white belly, black bib and rusty red back and wings

**Fun Fact:** Ruddy turnstones earn their name by flicking aside beach wrack that may hide tasty invertebrates.



### **Sanderling:**

May be found probing for mole crabs; in winter, pale-gray above and white below; in summer, rusty on the back, head and breast.

**Fun Fact:** Sanderlings migrate in spring to nest in the Arctic tundra.



Be careful not to disturb birds – they need time to feed and rest. Disturbance includes getting too close or causing them to fly. For additional information about shorebirds, visit [flshorebirdalliance.org](http://flshorebirdalliance.org) and [myfwc.com/shorebirds](http://myfwc.com/shorebirds).

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