

## ALL ABOUT SEAWEED

The seaweed is unsightly and it smells. It makes the beaches appear dirty. Some days it seems that it will never go away, as it blankets the shore and can be seen from the Seawall in pods as big as a football field. Beginning around May, the seaweed is an annual phenomenon on the beaches of Galveston. The seaweed, known as Gulfweed, is Mother Nature's way of protecting the Island.

The name seaweed incorrectly implies that this "weed" has little value. In fact, it is a floating ecosystem and, once arriving onshore, the "weed" becomes a vehicle for helping to prevent coastal erosion caused by seasonal tide changes, tropical storms and hurricanes.



### WHAT IS SEAWEED?

Gulfweed, also known as Sargassum, is a brown algae and is free floating. The seaweed is kept at the surface by its small but prominent berry-like bladders, keeping the upper parts of the plants extended toward the sun. As it travels with the wind and water currents, the seaweed breaks apart – sometimes into areas covering more than an acre.

This seaweed community supports a diverse ecosystem. Floating lines of Gulfweed provide a critical habitat for a wide variety of sea life, including mahi mahi, juvenile sea turtles and seabirds. Some of the creatures found within Sargassum cannot be found any other place in the world.

**INTERESTING FACT:** The Sargassumfish is a fascinating creature that has adapted in a very specific and interesting way to live among the sargassum weeds.

The harmless fish's pectoral fins are flexible and limblike and can actually be used to grasp the weed.

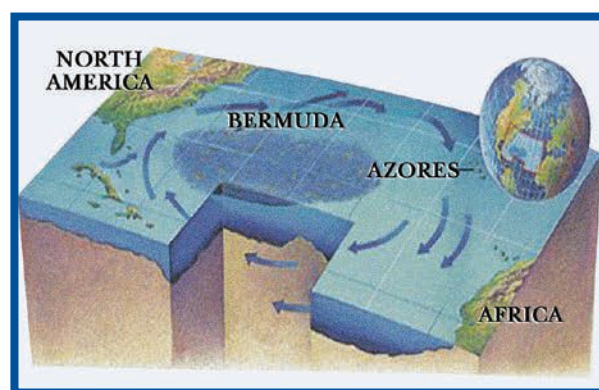


SARGASSUMFISH

### WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

The Sargasso Sea is a free-floating meadow of seaweed almost as large as a continent, lying between the United States and Africa in the North Atlantic Ocean. This sea is two-thirds the size of the United States.

Here, free-floating algae abound. It is estimated that seven million tons of live seaweed, or Sargassum, live in the sea. The Sargassum travels with the wind and water currents into the Gulf Stream, and eventually ends up on the Gulf Coast, where it is known as Gulfweed.



*Information provided by Dr. William J. Wardle,  
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