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Algae: A Different Kind of Life

Lakes, seas, and oceans on a map are usually colored blue. But in real life, bodies of water can be other colors. Some look green or yellow, or even red. These different colors are often caused by algae.

Scientists used to think algae were part of the plant kingdom. But they now know that algae are not true plants. Today, algae are considered part of the kingdom Protista. Many of the living things in this group have some things in common with both animals and plants. Some algae are made up of only one cell. You would need a microscope to see them. Other algae grow as long as 300 feet.

The larger forms of algae are divided into three main groups. Each group is a different color. These are green, brown, and red. There are about 7,000 different kinds of green algae. They live in fresh water, seawater, and on land. One example is pond scum. Green algae are a lot like true plants. They contain the same green substance plants use to get energy from light. Scientists think that the first plants came from green algae.



Kelp

Sea kelp is a common type of brown algae. It is found in northern oceans. Sea kelp can form huge floating masses. Some are many miles wide and more than 200 feet deep.

Red algae are common in tropical seas as seaweed. They are always attached to rocks and other things in the water. Do you like to eat ice cream and pudding? Then you've probably eaten forms of red seaweed. It is used to make these foods.



Red Algae

Algae play a big role in the natural world and in our everyday lives. Oil we get from the North Sea came from algae that sank to the ocean floor millions of years ago. People all over the world eat about 500 different kinds of algae.

Sometime algae can be deadly. Algae can grow very quickly in polluted water. This is called an algal **bloom**. The high numbers of algae in the water use up a great deal of oxygen. As a result, the fish in the water die. Shellfish may eat this algae. And then people get sick from eating the shellfish.

Algae: A Different Kind of Life

On a map, lakes, seas, and oceans are shown in blue. But these bodies of water may actually be many different colors, including green, yellow, and even red. These colors are often caused by algae, simple organisms that live in the water.

Scientists used to include algae in the plant kingdom. But they now know that algae are not true plants. Today, algae are considered part of the kingdom Protista. Many organisms in this group have characteristics of both animals and plants. Some algae are one-celled organisms that can be seen only with a microscope. Others grow as long as 300 feet.

The larger forms of algae are divided into three main groups, according to their colors. These are green, brown, and red. There are about 7,000 different kinds of green algae, living in fresh water, seawater, and on land. One example is pond scum. Green algae are very similar to true plants. Green algae contain chlorophyll, the green substance plants use to obtain energy from sunlight. Most scientists believe that the first plants came from green algae.

The most familiar kind of brown algae is sea kelp. Sea kelp is found in northern oceans. There it can form floating masses that are many miles wide and more than 200 feet deep.

Red algae commonly grow in tropical seas, where they are found as seaweed. Red algae are always attached to rocks and other things in the water. Do you like to eat ice cream and pudding? Then you've probably eaten forms of red seaweed. It's used to make these foods.

Algae play a big role in the natural world and in our everyday lives. Large oil deposits in the North Sea came from algae that sank to the ocean floor millions of years ago. People all over the world eat about 500 different kinds of algae.

Sometimes algae are deadly. When lakes have high amounts of sewage and fertilizer, algae can grow very quickly. This is called an **algal bloom**. The high numbers of algae in the water use up a great deal of oxygen. As a result, the fish in the water die. And people who get sick from eating shellfish are often made sick by algae that the shellfish have eaten.



Read each question. Circle the letter of the best answer.

- 1 Scientists used to think of algae as ____.
- A animals B plants C insects D people
- 2 What is the main idea of the second paragraph?
- A There are three kinds of algae.
B Algae are found in water and land.
C All algae are grouped by colors.
D Algae are neither plants nor animals.
- 3 You can decide from this article that red algae are ____.
- A harvested C free floating
B unimportant D in danger of dying out
- 4 In an algal bloom, what happens *third*?
- A The algae grow very quickly.
B The pollution in the water increases.
C The fish in the water die.
D The algae use up a great deal of oxygen.
- 5 Which statement is a fact about algae?
- A Green algae can make a mess of ponds.
B Sea kelp is one type of brown algae.
C Brown algae create majestic underwater forests.
D Red algae are more important than green algae.
- 6 As a result of the algae that sank to the ocean floor millions of years ago, today we have ____.
- A vast oil deposits C algal blooms
B many kinds of seaweeds D giant kelp beds
- 7 In this article, the word **bloom** means ____.
- A color changes C extreme growth
B flowers D thin coating



Write your answer to each question on the lines.

8 What do you think would happen if all the algae disappeared? Explain.

Handwriting lines for question 8.

9 Some kinds of seaweed are considered delicious food. Imagine you are a seaweed farmer. You want to increase sales. Write a paragraph that would convince more people to try seaweed.

Handwriting lines for question 9.

