

Wracks

Everyone is familiar with the plants that grow on land, but plants also grow in the sea. These plants are called seaweeds. Seaweeds play an important role on the shore, providing food and shelter for many animals. Though there are many shapes and sizes of seaweeds, they are divided into three main groups, depending on their colour. These groups are the greens, the browns and the reds. The first seaweeds you will probably notice on the shore are the brown seaweeds, particularly the wracks. They often form large blankets of cover, protecting many of the animals and other seaweeds on the shore. They are tougher than most, as they have strong leathery leaf-like fronds and many have a powerful stipe (stem) and holdfast, which they use to attach themselves to the rocks.

Channelled Wrack

Pelvetia canaliculata Caisíneach



This brown seaweed gets its name from its fronds, which are curled to form a channel on one side. This channel is used to hold water, thus preventing the seaweed from drying out. Because of this, it is able to survive without water for several days on the upper shore. Channelled Wrack is light brown in colour when wet but becomes very dark as it dries out. It has no midrib or air bladders but has tips that may swell to form reproductive bodies.

Spiral Wrack

Fucus spiralis Casfheamainn



Spiral Wrack is a common brown seaweed which is well suited to living on the shore, having tough, flexible and leathery fronds that resist damage by waves and exposure to air. The frond of Spiral Wrack has a midrib and is slightly twisted; it spirals even more as it dries out. Although it can resist some drying out, Spiral Wrack is not able to survive out of water as well as Channelled Wrack, so it usually forms a belt slightly lower on the shore.

Bladder Wrack

Fucus vesiculosus Feamainn bhoilgíneach



Bladder Wrack is a type of brown seaweed, but, like other wracks, it can sometimes appear olive green. It gets its name from the air bladders which are generally found in pairs along the frond. There are separate male and female plants, and at certain times of the year orange reproductive bodies grow from the ends of the fronds. Bladder Wrack can resist drying out for a short period, but needs to be covered by the tide at least once a day. Because of this, it is usually found attached to rocks and boulders on the middle shore.

Serrated/ Toothed Wrack

Fucus serratus Míoránach



The saw-like or serrated edge of its frond gives this seaweed its common name. The leathery, branching frond is usually olive green in colour, though it may appear orange brown. Unable to survive out of water for long, it is found on the lower shore where its tough, flexible frond helps to reduce damage from wave action and its strong holdfast prevents it being washed away. The fronds of Serrated Wrack are often covered by the tiny white spiral tubes of the Coiled Tube Worm.