

Image courtesy of Paul Key



Kelp Forests

Kelp are large brown seaweeds that grow on rocks, from the low tide mark downwards. They can be found at depths of 2m to 30m, often forming large underwater forests.

Like forests of trees, kelp forests are important habitats, providing food and shelter for other marine life. The structure of kelp is different to trees. Instead of leaves, kelp have fronds. Depending on the species of seaweeds, these fronds come in different shapes and sizes, from large palm-like fronds, to long curly straps. The fronds produce a sticky mucus to prevent animals attaching to them, though by the end of the summer, they can still be covered in marine animals such as sea firs and sea mats.

Holding up the frond is a strong stipe, a little like a stem or tree trunk. This stipe holds the seaweed up to sunlight, which filters down through the water. Like land plants, seaweeds get energy from the sun, which they turn into food to help them grow—and kelp is a very fast-growing seaweed.

Unlike land plants, kelp and other seaweeds do not have roots. Instead they have a sticky holdfast, which they use to cling firmly to rocks.

Image courtesy of Susan Murphy Wickens



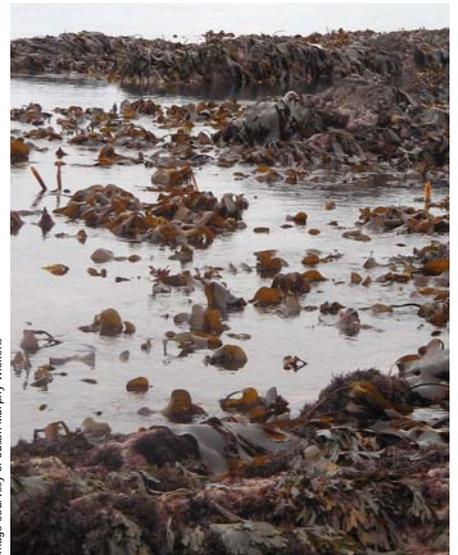
Kelp seaweeds include a number of species of seaweeds. They can grow 2-3m in length. Commonly seen in Irish waters are: Oarweed (*Laminara digitata*) (above) and Sugar Kelp (*Saccharina latissima*).

Image courtesy of Paul Key



It is important for kelp to have a strong holdfast to withstand the power of the waves and to prevent them from being washed away.

Image courtesy of Susan Murphy Wickens



This view of a kelp forest, seen during a very low tide, is typical of how many people will see a kelp forest.