

Sponges

Scientific Name: Porifera

Irish Name: Spúinse

Sponges are very simple animals. They are usually found on the lower shore, underneath rocks and in damp crevices. They feed by taking water into the body and filtering out the tiny particles of food, which they then absorb. The shape of the body varies, but basically consists of an internal skeleton supporting a series of canals which carry water to all parts. These canals are connected to the outside by a number of openings. The food-filled water enters through many tiny surface pores, called inhalant openings, and the waste is pumped out through a few larger openings, called exhalant openings.

The adult sponges live permanently attached to rocks or shells, but have free swimming larvae (eggs) which enable the young to spread to other areas. In exposed areas where there are strong water currents or breaking waves, sponges tend to grow with rounded or flattened shapes, to avoid damage. In more sheltered areas, they can grow more upright, often with delicate branching shapes.



This deep orange-coloured sponge (*Hymeniacidon perleve*) is often found alongside the Breadcrumb Sponge. It can be distinguished from it by its colour, its lumpy surface and the fact that the openings are not usually volcano-shaped.

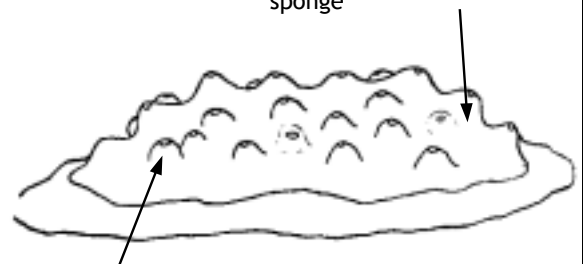


(Photography courtesy of Paul Kay)

The Breadcrumb Sponge is one of the most common sponges to be found on the seashore. It forms encrusting patches on rocks and on the stems of kelp seaweeds.

A Typical Sponge

tiny inhalant openings - where water enters the sponge



larger exhalant openings - where waste water leaves the sponge



Bath Sponges

While most sponges we use for washing are synthetic, some are actually natural sponges that have been harvested from the sea.