

# SEA SPONGE



*Black Leather Sponge*  
*Photo by Meet the Sea*

## History

Fossil records show that sponges have existed for at least 600 million years, and they've been incredibly important to marine ecosystems.

However, what is less commonly known is how useful they have been to humans throughout history. The reason that we use sponges as cleaning tools (whether cleaning ourselves or the space around us) is because ancient civilisations used sea sponges for the same purposes. Records show that in Ancient Greece, Olympic athletes would bathe themselves using sea sponges before competitions.

Although now the sponges we use are usually either synthetic or taken from a 'sponge gourd', which is a plant, the legacy of sea sponges as a very important tool for many different tasks is a normal part of many people's daily lives.

## Scientific Name:

*Sarcotragus spinosulus* (black leather sponge)

## Key Information

Although they might look like plants, sea sponges are actually animals - specifically marine invertebrates.

There are approximately 8500 living species of sponges which vary significantly in size and appearance.

Sponges can be less than a centimetre long but also range up to one or two metres. This depends on their age, species, the conditions of their environment and how much food they can access.

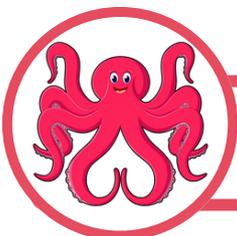
The black leather sponge (pictured here) is considered a relatively large sponge, reaching around 10cm in diameter.

## Food

Sea sponges are 'filter feeders', which means they get their food from nutrients that are floating in the water, allowing them to eat even though they are unable to move. This process cleans the surrounding water as a whole, as the sponges collect bacteria that pass through their systems.

## Habitat

Sea sponges can be found at all different depths of water and in a range of conditions. Some sponges are sensitive to light and develop in caves or in the shadows of underwater shelters. There are some species which live closer to the surface of the water, which often host types of photosynthetic algae or bacteria in a symbiotic relationship.



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