

Sea Lettuce — Kapuustaq

KAPUUSTAT ATURTAARAIT NAUCESTARWIGMI. – THEY USE KELP (SEA LETTUCE) IN THE GARDEN.



Photo: Bright green sea lettuce growing among other marine algae on Kodiak's coast.

The sea lettuce found in the Kodiak Archipelago (*Ulva* sp.) is a bright green, leafy, intertidal alga that thrives on rocky shores. This marine plant has smooth, transparent leaves with small holes that can grow up to a foot long. These leaves have a short stem, or stipe, that clings to rocks with a tough, fibrous hold on. This plant is widely available. It grows along the Pacific coast from Korea to California. It prefers calm waters in the mid intertidal zone and can be found in Kodiak's sheltered bays and inlets.

The Alutiiq word for sea lettuce may come from the Russian word for cabbage, perhaps as a reference to the leafy character of both plants. Today, Alutiiq people do not harvest much sea lettuce. However, one user notes that it can be dried and the resulting flakes added to soups and stews. Some people also fry dried sea lettuce to make tasty chips.

Anthropological information suggests that Alutiiq people used marine algae more frequently in past. Although these plants contain a lot of water, they are nutritious. They are a source of carbohydrates that can be eaten fresh or dried for later use. They are also a valuable source of emergency food and even medicine. One Elder recalls eating rockweed when he was traveling and out of food. Another Elder reports that ribbon kelp can be heated and applied to arthritic joints for pain relief.