

MARTHA
STEWART

AUGUST 2003

Living

fruit-filled sangrias
exuberant gardens
vegetable tarts
the best of blueberries
seaside crafts

the bounty
of high summer

THE ART OF PRESSED

sea eed



PRESERVING THE
BEAUTY OF PLANTS
FROM THE SEA

UNDERWATER ART
Pressed seaweed can bring a surprising elegance to a room's décor (this page). This modern composition features two varieties—*Laminaria saccharina* and *Punctaria latifolia*. (See the Guide for framing how-to.) **OPPOSITE:** These specimens from Rhode Island show seaweed's varied forms, textures, and hues (clockwise from top): *Codium fragile*, *Laminaria saccharina*, *Chondrus crispus*, *Palmaria palmata*, and *Acrosiphonia arcta*.



SEAWEED SAMPLING

An array of Victorian pressings (opposite) illustrates the range of forms the ocean offers. Exposed to air and light, the plants' vivid colors have faded. Seaweed can be found on the east and west coasts of the United States. In Maine (below), olive-green rockweed grows along the shore; *Palmaria*, known for its flat red blades, is also common in this area.

NOWHERE IS THE VICTORIAN FASCINATION WITH NATURE MORE EVIDENT THAN IN THE BOTANICAL COLLECTIONS OF THAT ERA. Plants of all kinds were gathered to aid scientific investigation, and seaweed—marine algae—was no exception. During the mid-nineteenth century, the shorelines of England were rife with collectors, many of them women. Relegated by a predominantly male scientific community to studying “lower plants,” these early enthusiasts waded deep into the tide to collect specimens—valued for their splendid forms and surprising range of colors—for examination and display.

It's a practice that holds a certain allure even today. And you needn't be a scientist to get excited about collecting seaweed. The plants are plentiful, and the process of hunting for them can be a great deal of fun. Whether you want to gather seaweed to preserve yourself (see page 133 for instructions) or you're interested in collecting pressings of marine life, there is much to learn from the Victorians. More than a century has passed, but many of

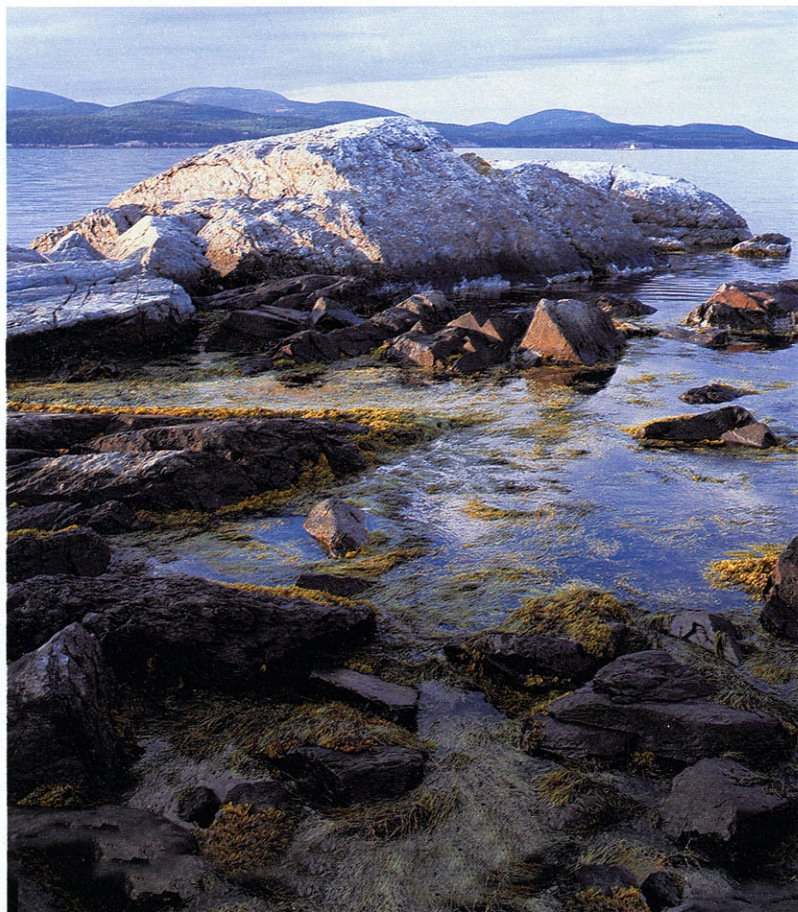
the specimens they preserved remain intact and can be viewed in natural-history museums, private research collections, and, in a very few cases, specialty antiques galleries.

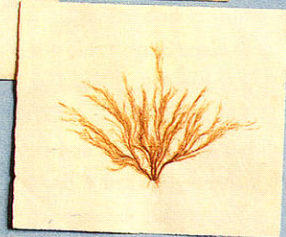
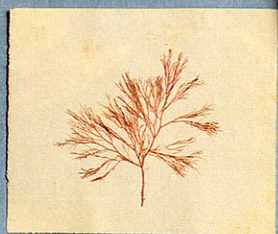
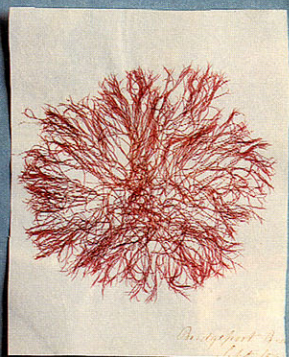
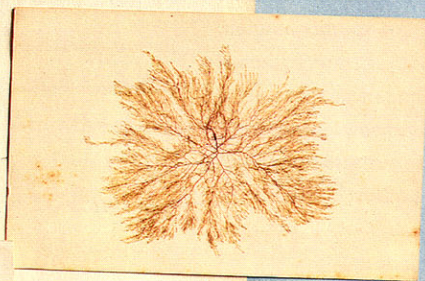
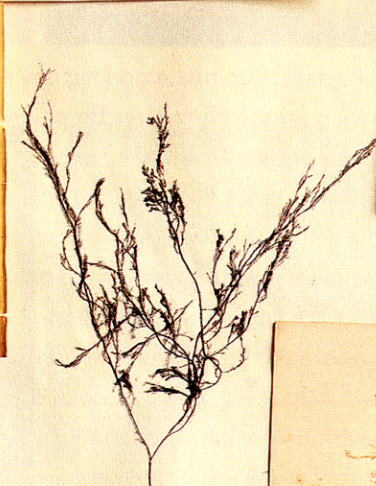
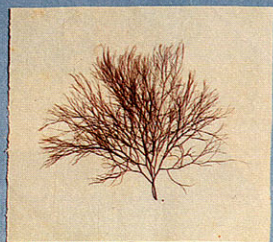
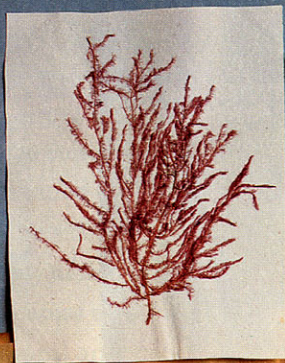
In the United States, it was W. G. Farlow, a renowned nineteenth-century botanist and the author of the 1881 book *Marine Algae of New England and Adjacent Coast*, who brought the study of seaweed a new level of attention. Today, the Farlow Herbarium at Harvard University houses thousands of seaweed specimens, offering a stunning introduction to the field.

Of course, the most natural way to learn about seaweed is to visit the shore. Once you remove the plants from their watery home and examine them, you will see the same recognizable elements of beauty you would find in flowers, including enticing colors and varied, intricate textures. “What makes searching for the plants even more exciting is the element of surprise,” says Alex Frost, a former research scientist and owner of the Cryptogamic Botany Company in Rhode Island, which is devoted to the study of plants such as algae and ferns. “After all, you're looking for beauty—in what looks like muck!” People are often pleased upon their first encounters with these plants. Frost ascribes this to the symmetrical patterns that many seaweeds exhibit—a quality that people universally find appealing.

Molly Fallon, a Rhode Island artist who works with Frost at his studio, takes the interest in seaweed further by pressing and displaying it as fine art. “Our work—the scientific and the artistic together—pays homage to the Victorian tradition of plant pressing while using modern preservation techniques,” she says.

From a layman's perspective, gathering seaweed can be a wonderful excuse to spend a day at the beach. To get started, you'll need a couple of water jugs, a pocketknife, some resealable plastic bags, a notebook for recording





Callithamnion microcarpum, S. Ag.

Tahiti

Call. comosum, How.

From Monterey, Mexico.

From
Bismarck
March 1881.

Halimnion sordidum

Callithamnion latissimum, How.

Tasmania

Desmarestia



information, a white towel (on which to arrange the seaweed), and ice packs to keep the plants cool. Make a lunch, slip into some sturdy shoes (the best specimens are often found on slippery rocks), and let curiosity be your guide.

Seaweed can be collected freely along much of the U.S. coastline, but in some areas a permit is required—check with both local and state authorities before setting out. Usually, you can find seaweed attached to rocks in shallow water, or on docks and piers. You can also collect drifting pieces that wash in with the waves at low tide. Just be sure the seaweed is fresh. Decaying seaweed often feels slimy and sometimes its pigments leach out into the surrounding water. But your best guide is your nose: Fresh seaweed should smell clean.

Seaweed is categorized by color: green, or *Chlorophyta*; brown, or *Phaeophyta*; and red, or *Rhodophyta*. Generally, you'll find green seaweed in shallow water and brown on rocky shores. Red seaweed is diverse and can be found almost anywhere. You can collect a range of varieties, or focus on a single type.

Take only intact specimens, leaving any that are ripped or damaged. When you find a piece you like, use the pocketknife to gently scrape it off any surface it is attached to, then immediately submerge it in a bucket of cold seawater. To make sure your specimens stay fresh, add ice packs and keep the water out of direct sunlight. Be sensitive to the marine environment, and don't collect more than you need. After gathering your seaweed, lay it out on the towel, choose the best, then return the remainder to the sea. "It's easy to get that eyes-bigger-than-stomach syndrome," Frost says. "But it's impossible to press a lot of pieces to good effect, so be moderate." Make a note of where you found each piece, and just before leaving the shore, fill another bucket with clean seawater to use later for storing the seaweed.



Once you get home, sort and clean your findings, rinsing off sand and trimming away any attached rocks or shells. Drop the pieces you will use into the bucket of clean seawater, and press them within a day. Some kinds will stay fresh for up to two days, in seawater kept in the refrigerator, but most will decay more quickly.

If you want to identify your seaweed, use a field guide to do so before pressing, which can change the plants' appearance. After the specimen has dried, you can write any information—such as the variety, location, date, person it was collected and identified by, and the field guide referenced—directly on the paper you have used to make the pressing.

Seaweed has a history of inspiring passion in its collectors. So whether you fancy it for its beauty alone or want to learn more about these plants, be prepared: It's not unusual to discover that a morning spent knee-deep in the ocean, bucket in hand, sun overhead, leads to many more pleasant days of the same.

(To learn how to press seaweed, turn the page.)

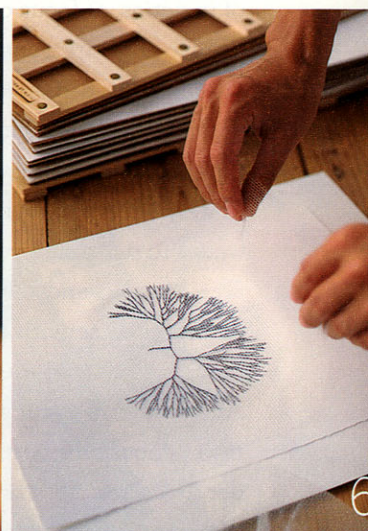
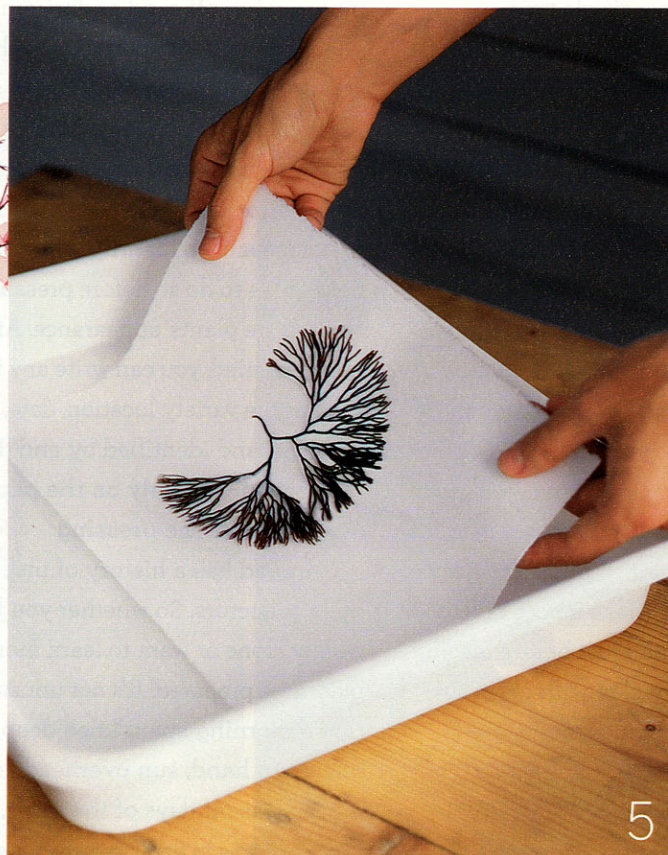
PRESERVATION AND PRESENTATION

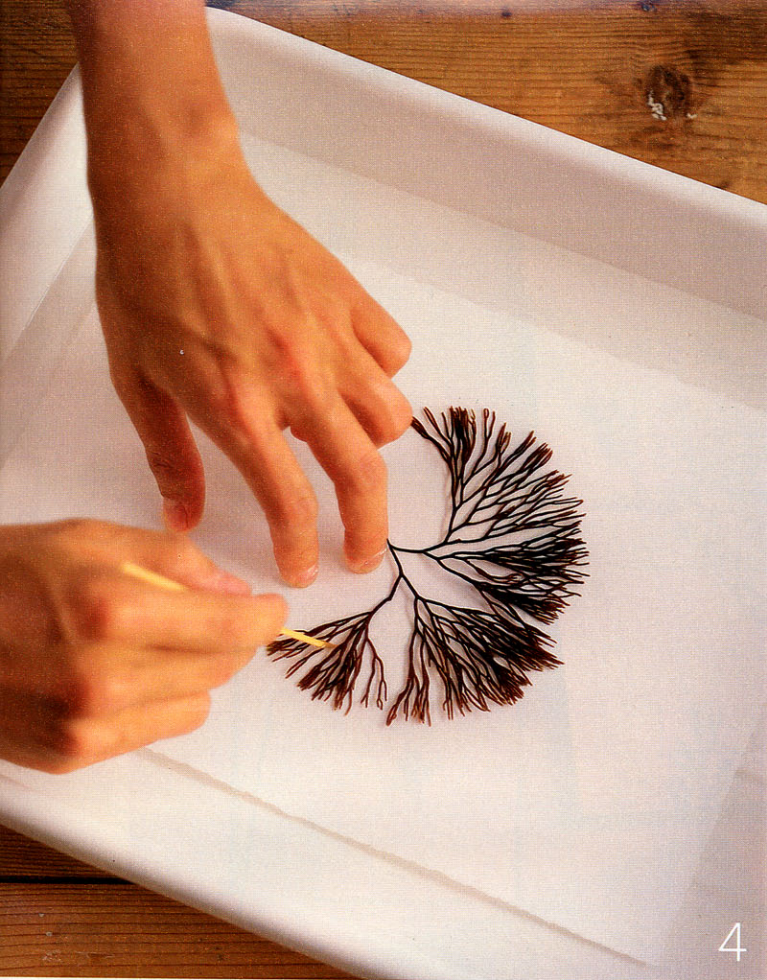
An arrangement of newly collected seaweed in pink tones (above) is framed against pale-pink paper. Its warm hues match those of the smaller, vintage specimens. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Victorian seaweed collections were often stored in books, and trading was common. This century-old pressing (probably *Desmarestia* sp.) mimics the plant's underwater formation. A Victorian collection is presented in a book made from a seashell. Plants suspended in seawater have an ethereal quality, like a floating flower arrangement.

YOU WILL NEED SEAWATER • SHALLOW TRAY • BLOTTING PAPER
 • 100 PERCENT COTTON RAG PAPER, CUT TO FIT TRAY • TOOTH-
 PICKS, PAINTBRUSHES, AND TWEEZERS • NAIL CLIPPERS • NYLON
 NETTING • PLANT PRESS • CORRUGATED CARDBOARD, CUT TO
 FIT PRESS • WEIGHTS • FAN • WHITE CRAFT GLUE OR POLYVINYL
 ACETATE GLUE • SEAWEED FIELD GUIDE

DELICATE IMAGES

Nearly transparent pressings—*Porphyra* and *Ceramium* (below), and *Dasya baillouviana* (opposite, behind text)—look like watercolors. Specimens pressed onto 100 percent rag card stock (opposite, bottom right) make charming stationery.





how to press seaweed

1. Sort and clean specimens. **2.** Pour $\frac{1}{4}$ inch cold, clean seawater into tray; place a sheet of blotting paper along-side. **3.** Slide a sheet of cotton rag paper into water, tipping tray so paper is submerged. Turn paper over to thoroughly soak, and push it underwater. **4.** Place specimen on paper; arrange with toothpick, paintbrush, or tweezers. Use your fingernail or nail clippers to trim. **5.** Carefully lift the paper at an angle so water drips off. **6.** Lay it on blotting paper. Quickly adjust arrangement; remove any debris. Move paper and arrangement to fresh blotting paper; cover with nylon netting. Top with another sheet of blotting paper; press gently. Replace wet blotters with clean ones. **7.** Place layers between two sheets of corrugated cardboard; place this "sandwich" in the plant press. (You can load several at one time.) **8.** Weight plant press down; tighten straps. Direct a fan, placed 1 to 3 feet away, at cardboard's open edges. Check press initially every few hours (daily thereafter), replacing damp blotters. When dry (delicate specimens will dry overnight; coarse ones may take a few days), unload press and remove nylon netting. Seaweed will adhere naturally, but some pieces may be loose. Carefully affix these using paintbrush and craft glue. Label specimens, if desired.

