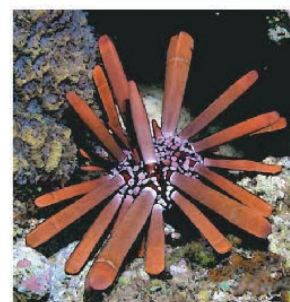


Unbelievable Urchins



Sea urchins are cool sea creatures. These tiny animals spend their lives on the sea floor munching on food. Urchins are echinoderms (e-ky-no-derms). Other echinoderms are sea stars, sea cucumbers, sand dollars and brittle stars. Echinoderm means "spiny skin" and all echinoderms have spiny skin, spines or what looks like spines. Echinoderms have special tube feet, like suction cups, that help them move and hang on to things. They also have 5 parts. Urchins have 5 sets of spines, sea stars have 5 legs, and sea cucumbers have 5 rows of tube feet.

Sea urchins are very special in their own way. They have an endoskeleton - a skeleton on the inside like ours. An urchin's skeleton is like a ball and is called a "test". Attached to their test are their spines, and each spine can move in any direction they choose.



Urchins' mouths are on the bottom and they use their sticky tube feet to drag themselves to better food. They actually have 5 teeth in a complicated jaw called "Aristotle's Lantern" that they use to bite off algae. In California, urchins are important to kelp forests. If otters do not eat enough urchins, the urchins eat too much kelp and the whole system is a mess!



Urge for an Urchin

Urchins make great pets in your salt water aquarium. Whether they are collector urchins, or pencil urchins, they will spend their days munching on algae growing on your tank's live rock. Keeping your tank clean is their pleasure.

There are many types of sea urchins. Some have thin long spines that are poisonous, and some have spines that are thicker than pencils! Collector urchins are hard to see...they use their tube feet to hold shells and sea weed to themselves like hats so that they will blend in. Some cultures even eat sea urchins! These are some crazy animals...



Try This! Make your own urchin

What you will need:
1 paper plate
mini pretzel sticks
Snowball snacks
Twizzler Pull N Peel

On your paper plate, place your snowball and use a pretzel to make holes all over. Put 1" pieces of Pull N Peel in each hole to create tube feet. Now, place pretzel sticks all over to cover your urchin in spines.

