

# Stop

# The Invasion



Photographs courtesy of Rachel Woodfield, Merkel & Associates, Inc., Bugwood.org; Caulerpa Action Team Archive, Bugwood.org

## Caulerpa

*Caulerpa taxifolia*

Report  
Sightings

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### What is it?

Caulerpa is native to the Caribbean Sea and the Indian Ocean. It is a bright green, marine alga popular as a saltwater aquarium specimen. Called “killer algae,” it is known as the algae that took over the Mediterranean Sea.

### Is it here yet?

No, but California recently spent \$7 million to eradicate two small infestations in southern Californian waters. Although scientists consider caulerpa to be a tropical species, it can survive many months in cooler waters. Like many invasive species, it is highly adaptable.

### Why should I care?

In the Mediterranean Sea, caulerpa has infested thousands of acres of seafloor. It created ecological and economic devastation by overgrowing and eliminating native sea grasses, reefs, and other native communities. It has harmed tourism and recreational diving, and had a costly impact on commercial fishing by altering the fishery and entangling fishing nets. Should caulerpa adapt to the cooler waters of Puget Sound, it could have devastating impacts to Washington.

### What should I do if I find one?

Report online at [www.invasivespecies.wa.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.wa.gov). To properly dispose of caulerpa, place it in a bag and freeze for 24 hours, and put in the trash. Report potential specimens found on gear or vessels.

### How can we stop it?

- Do not dump the contents of any aquarium into marine or freshwaters. Dump all aquarium water into a toilet.
- Do not purchase, plant, or trade this species. Although the federal government



Photograph courtesy of Greig Peters, Regional Water Quality Control Board, Bugwood.org

lists caulerpa taxifolia on the federal noxious weed list, there are other caulerpa species for sale. Do not purchase caulerpa on the Internet.

## What are its characteristics?

- Bright green
- Long-running stem known as a stolon, which extend out from main patch at multiple locations
- Rubbery texture that holds its shape out of water
- Upright fronds of various shapes
- Secured in ground with fine hairs known as rhizoids

## How do I distinguish caulerpa from native species?

Caulerpa may sometimes be confused with:

- Codium sp. (Deadman's fingers)
- Bryopsis sp. (Sea fern)
- Corallina sp.
- Enteromorpha sp. (Hollow green weed)
- Fucus sp. (Bladder wrack)
- Ulva sp. (Sea lettuce)

For photographss of caulerpa and similar species see [https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/291/docs/Caulerpa\\_Species\\_ID\\_Key.pdf](https://dornsife.usc.edu/assets/sites/291/docs/Caulerpa_Species_ID_Key.pdf)

## Where can I get more information?

- U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Library  
[www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/aquatics/caulerpa.shtml](http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/aquatics/caulerpa.shtml)

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