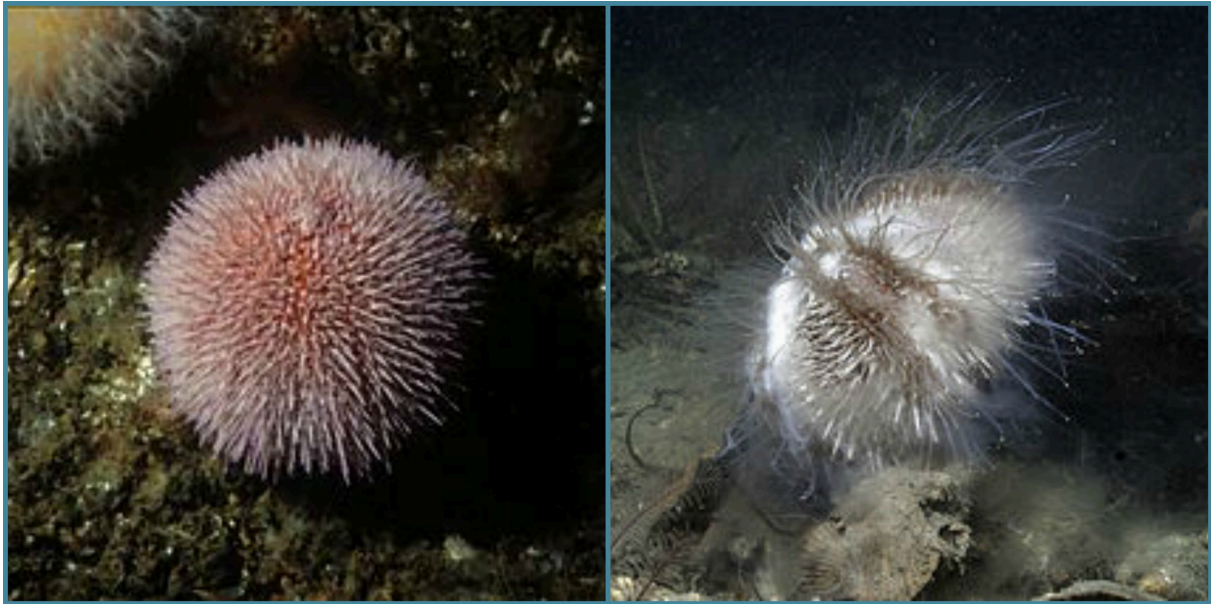


SPECIES OF THE WEEK



Edible Sea Urchin

Echinus esculentus
Cuán mara coiteann

The Edible Sea Urchin is a small round animal growing to a diameter of around 15-16cm and has a spherical shape. They are typically pinky red or orange in colour with short white spines. It is a species native to Ireland and most cold waters of the northern Atlantic Ocean.

They are typically an intertidal species and live at a depth of between 0-40m. Though they can be found all around our coast, they stick to rocky shores. Their strong tests (shell) protect them from strong waves and so can be found on both sheltered shores and also those subject to intense wave action. Edible Sea Urchins are grazers and eat algae on the seafloor. Their constant feeding can have a big impact on kelp communities. What seaweeds live in a given area can be determined by sea urchin grazing and so they are an important species for managing species diversity. They also eat small invertebrates like barnacles. Edible Sea Urchins are common food for a large variety of animals like birds, otters and fish. As their name indicates, they are edible for humans as well and while aren't eaten on a large scale they are often eaten in local regions. The edible parts are their roe (gonads) which are a popular part of Asian cuisine.

They are very simple animals with no brain and a basic nervous system. Their jaws are built for rasping and are located on their underside and their anus is located on their top, making them basically an eating machine. This is a common characteristic of urchins and their relatives like starfish and sand dollars. One unifying feature of these animals is that they have Radial Symmetry. Most animals that we imagine have Bilateral Symmetry, whereby if you draw a line down their body the two halves would be symmetrical. Horses, lions, grasshoppers and humans all have bilateral symmetry; we have a left and a right side. Radial Symmetry is where the animal is like a cake and no matter where you draw a line it will pretty much always be symmetrical; they have no left or right sides.