

Coral Reef

A coral reef is a community of living organisms. It is made up of plants, fish, and many other creatures. Coral reefs are some of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. They are home to about 25% of all marine life!

There are sponges, sea slugs, oysters, clams, crabs, shrimp, sea worms, starfish and sea urchins, jellyfish and sea anemones; various types of fungi, sea turtles, and many species of fish. Think of them as the “rainforests of the oceans.”



Coral reefs have been around for millions of years. Less than 0.1% of the world’s ocean floor is covered by coral reefs. The reefs grow best in warm, shallow, clear, sunny and moving water. However, they grow very slowly—anywhere from 0.3 cm to 10 cm per year. The reefs we see today have been growing over the past 5 000 to 10 000 years.



Coral reefs are made of tiny animals called “polyps” that stay fixed in one place and are the main structure of a reef. Polyps have a hard outer skeleton made of calcium (similar to a snail’s shell).

Coral reefs do a number of amazing things! Reefs:

- Protect shorelines from big waves by absorbing wave energy
- Provide a safe place for fish to spawn (release eggs into the water)
- Provide habitats for a large variety of organisms
- Provide food (fish and shellfish) for many people living along coastlines
- Are a source of medication—some anti-cancer drugs and painkillers come from reefs
- Help in the carbon cycle