

Name: _____

Attack of the Killer Algae

by Sandie Lee

What's green, leafy, lives under water, can grow up to 2.8 meters in height, and is considered a killer? *Caulerpa taxifolia*, or more commonly known as *killer algae*.



What is Algae?

Algae were one of the first plants to develop in our seas from tiny, simple celled creatures called bacteria. These bacteria were so small you could fit thousands of them on a single pin head. Over time some of these bacteria cells formed into what we know today as algae.

Algae can be found in many places. You may have seen algae growing on the sides of an aquarium or in someone's outdoor pond or even a swimming pool. Mostly this slimy, green substance is harmless. In fact, it even provides food for a variety of fish and sea creatures.

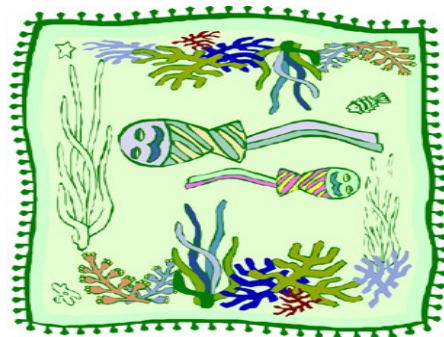
To look at killer algae you'd probably think it was pretty, but lurking beneath those pretty leaf-like fronds, lays the making of a disaster.

What makes it so dangerous?

It's hardy enough to grow in any conditions from cold to warm water, on rock, sand, mud, and from depths of 3-100 meters. This fast growing, invasive species of algae quickly spreads, smothering out all the other species of algae and sea grass. Plus, it's highly toxic to many species of fish and sea life.

How Does It Spread?

One of the ways killer algae spreads is by attaching to ship anchors and being dragged for thousands of kilometers before it's released into a new area. Around 1985 this pretty killer was accidentally introduced into the Mediterranean Sea. It soon began to spread and become a poisonous problem. It now covers 32,000 acres of the coast of France, Spain, Italy and Croatia. People here who depend on fishing for their livelihoods are in trouble as this killer algae takes over the sea floors.

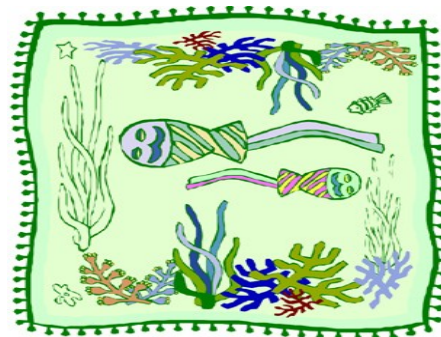


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1. Why is killer algae dangerous?
- a. it smothers other species of algae
 - b. it smothers other species of sea grass
 - c. it is poisonous to fish and sea life
 - d. all of the above



2. Tell whether each statement is true or false.

_____ All algae is harmful to sea life.

_____ Killer algae can grow over 2 meters in height.

_____ Killer algae grows only in warm, tropical waters.

_____ Some types of algae provide food for fish and sea creatures.

3. What is one way that killer algae is spread?

4. Read the sentence below and define the underlined word. Use a dictionary if you need to.

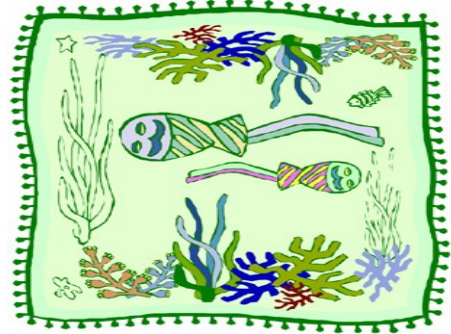
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ANSWER KEY

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1. Why is killer algae dangerous? **d**
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2. Tell whether each statement is true or false.

false All algae is harmful to sea life.

true Killer algae can grow over 2 meters in height.

false Killer algae grows only in warm, tropical waters.

true Some types of algae provide food for fish and sea creatures.

3. What is one way that killer algae is spread?

Killer algae is spread by attaching itself to sea anchors. It is dragged thousands of kilometers and released into a new area.

4. Read the sentence below and define the underlined word. Use a dictionary if you need to.

It's hardy enough to grow in any conditions from cold to warm water, on rock, sand, mud, and from depths of 3-100 meters.

Not very affected by hardship and difficult conditions; Adapted to survive in diverse conditions