

Name: _____

Coral Reef: The Ocean's Coolest Neighborhood



By Lydia Lukidis

There might not be anything cooler in the whole ocean than a coral reef! In fact, coral reefs are actually some of the most fascinating living communities on Earth.

Did you ever wonder how a coral reef forms? Tiny animals called coral polyps are responsible for the formation of coral reefs. The coral polyps attach to rocks or other hard surfaces and continue to grow throughout their lifespan. When they die, they harden. Then new coral polyps grow on top of them. This makes the reef expand. In fact, coral reefs are always growing. They grow about 1-2 cm per year.



A reef is a shallow underwater area made of coral. Many fish and sea animals live in and around reefs.

Let's talk more about these little coral polyps. Like all animals, coral polyps need to eat. Their diet consists mainly of other miniscule animals, such as plankton and algae. The algae get their food from the sun. Because sunlight can only penetrate shallow water, the algae and coral polyps live in shallow water. This is where coral reefs generally form. A wide variety of animals live in coral reefs. Some

animals live on the actual reef, like starfish, snails, and clams. Other species swim around the reef, like fish and sharks.

There are three types of coral reefs. Fringing reefs form along a coastline. Barrier reefs grow a bit farther from the land. They form parallel to the shore, separated from it by a deep channel of water. Finally, coral atolls are coral reefs that encircle a lagoon.

Coral reefs exist all around the world. The biggest one is called the Great Barrier Reef. The Great Barrier Reef is located off the northeast coast of Australia. It is very long, stretching out for 1,429 miles (2,300 km). It can even be seen from outer space! Every year, the beautiful Great Barrier Reef attracts many scuba divers and tourists, about 2 million visitors per year.



A coral reef is made from billions of tiny polyps, like the ones seen here.



Coral reefs are rainbows of color. Coral polyps can be orange, pink, blue, green, red, or almost any color imaginable.

Coral reefs are a vital part of our planet. First of all, they are a home for many animals. They also protect shorelines against storms and floods. They can even provide us with the natural resources we need to make some kinds of medicine. However, a serious problem is occurring: many coral reefs are dying. Pollution and over fishing are the main causes. And since coral reefs take a very long time to grow, they cannot

grow fast enough to replace the damage. As a result, the coral reefs around the world are starting to disappear. Some scientists predict that someday soon most of the coral reefs will be gone. That is why we have to take good care of them. We should do our best to protect these incredible living communities for generations to come!

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1. Describe the rate at which coral reefs grow.

2. Why are coral reefs found mostly in shallow water?

- a. Coral reefs thrive in shallow water because the sunlight penetrates the water and provides food for the algae that coral polyps eat.
- b. Coral reefs are protected in shallow water from damage by huge ocean animals like whales and great white sharks.
- c. Coral reefs cannot survive the saltiness of deep ocean water.
- d. Coral reefs cannot endure the currents in deep ocean water.

3. Circle the two hemispheres that the Great Barrier Reef is located within.

Northern Southern Eastern Western

4. Based on the information in the article, provide a brief definition of each of the three types of coral reefs.

fringing reef: _____

barrier reef: _____

coral atoll: _____

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

1. _____ variety
 2. _____ tourists
 3. _____ formation
 4. _____ encircle
 5. _____ pollution
 6. _____ vital
 7. _____ miniscule
 8. _____ channel
 9. _____ predict
 10. _____ lagoon
- a. to form a circle around
 - b. extremely important or necessary
 - c. to say something will happen in the future
 - d. people who visit or travel to a place for pleasure
 - e. a pool of salt water separated from the ocean by a coral reef
 - f. very tiny; microscopic
 - g. the act of being formed or developed
 - h. the presence of harmful substances in the environment
 - i. a long passage of water
 - j. a number of different things

