

Tunicate (colonial) *Didemnum vexillum*

DESCRIPTION	Extremely variable in form, the colony can be sheet like, leathery, lobed, or hang in droopy, pendulous extensions. The tunic contains distinctive spike or star shaped spicules that are visible only under a microscope.
RANGE	Considered a native of Asia, the specie has been introduced all over the world. First described on the west coast in 1993 in San Francisco, it is now present from CA to British Columbia, and most recently in Sitka, Alaska.
SIZE	Can form extensive mats, meters across.
STATUS	Invasive, see the complete record at http://invasions.si.edu/nemesis/
COLOR	variable, pale tan to orange.
HABITAT	colonizes most hard surfaces, both natural and man-made, but common at aquaculture facilities. Will grow over most species and can smother organisms, forming vast sheets.
TIDAL HEIGHT	low intertidal to about 81 m
SALINITY	18-40 ppt, but survives best between 26-30 ppt
TEMPERATURE	-2 - 24°C, needs temperatures > 9°C to reproduce
SIMILAR SPECIES	Native <i>Didemnum</i> and <i>Trididemnum</i> species can be hard to distinguish from <i>D. vexillum</i> without dissection. The brooded larvae of <i>D. vexillum</i> have 6 pairs of lateral ampullae, a characteristic unique to this Didemnid only. The native species do not form the extensive mats, nor the drip-like dangles that often occur in <i>D. vexillum</i> (photo bottom right).



subtidal © Linda Shaw



intertidal ©Heather Meuret Woody



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"dangle" ©Marnie Chapman

Pictures all from Whiting harbor, Sitka, Alaska