

## Tunicate (colonial) *Didemnum vexillum*

<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	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.
<b>RANGE</b>	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.
<b>SIZE</b>	Can form extensive mats, meters across.
<b>STATUS</b>	Invasive, see the complete record at <a href="http://invasions.si.edu/nemesis/">http://invasions.si.edu/nemesis/</a>
<b>COLOR</b>	variable, pale tan to orange.
<b>HABITAT</b>	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.
<b>TIDAL HEIGHT</b>	low intertidal to about 81 m
<b>SALINITY</b>	18-40 ppt, but survives best between 26-30 ppt
<b>TEMPERATURE</b>	-2 - 24°C, needs temperatures > 9°C to reproduce
<b>SIMILAR SPECIES</b>	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