

Wireweed

Species Description

Scientific name: *Sargassum muticum*

AKA: Japweed, Strangle weed, Sargaswm Japan (Welsh)

Native to: North-western Pacific shores

Habitat: Hard surfaces in shallow coastal water rarely deeper than 5 m

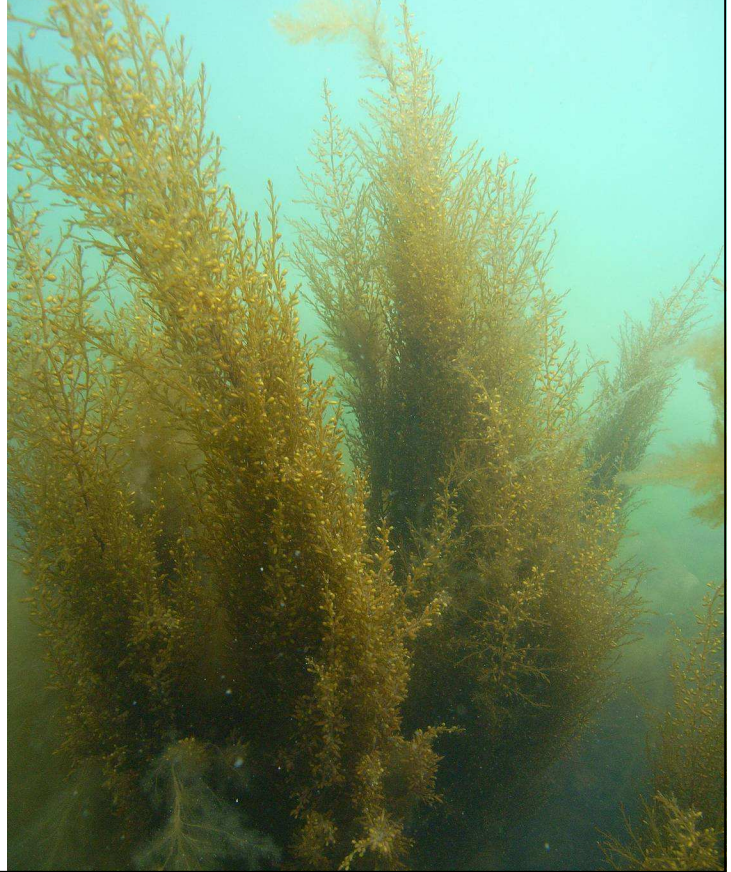
Not to be confused with the terrestrial plant, Wireweed (*Polygonum aviculare*).

A non-native seaweed initially introduced to France as a hitchhiker on oysters either from Canada or Japan. Wireweed probably spread from France to the UK, where it was first found on the Isle of Wight in 1973. It spreads rapidly, approximately 30 km per year along the coast of the UK, through very fast growth rate and production of numerous spores. It prefers warmer waters, but will tolerate a wide range of temperatures and salinity including estuarine conditions.

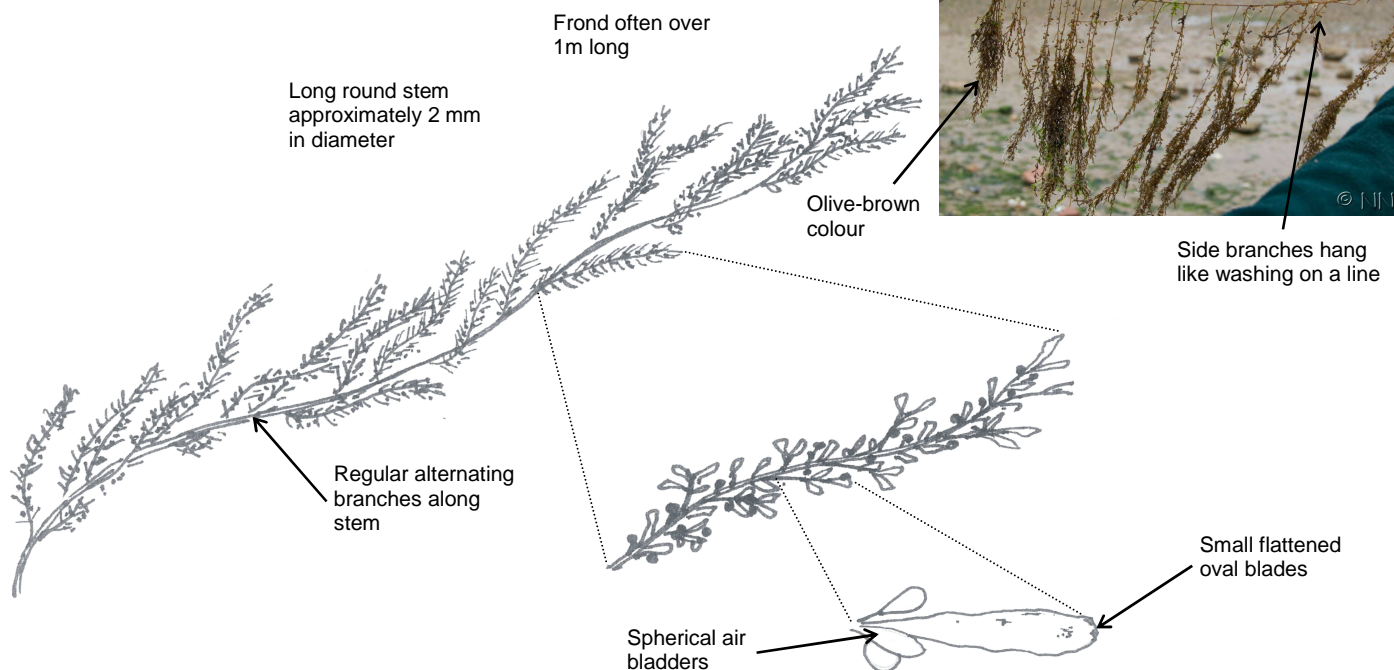
Wireweed can be a pest in harbours, shallow waters and on beaches, interfering with recreational use of waterways with detached plants forming large floating masses which can block propellers and intakes. It can also foul oyster beds and fishermen's nets and competes with native plants such as sea grasses.

Wireweed is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England, Wales and Scotland. As such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise allow this species to grow in the wild.

For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.



Key ID Features



Identification throughout the year

Branches die in autumn leaving only a small holdfast (the part of the plant which looks superficially like roots and anchors it to hard surfaces).

Field Signs

Fragments of wireweed can be found washed up on beaches mixed in with the flotsam.



Distribution

Originally introduced into the Isle of Wight, now spreading along whole of south coast of England, additional locations in west Wales and some parts of Scotland and Ireland.

Source: MarLIN undated

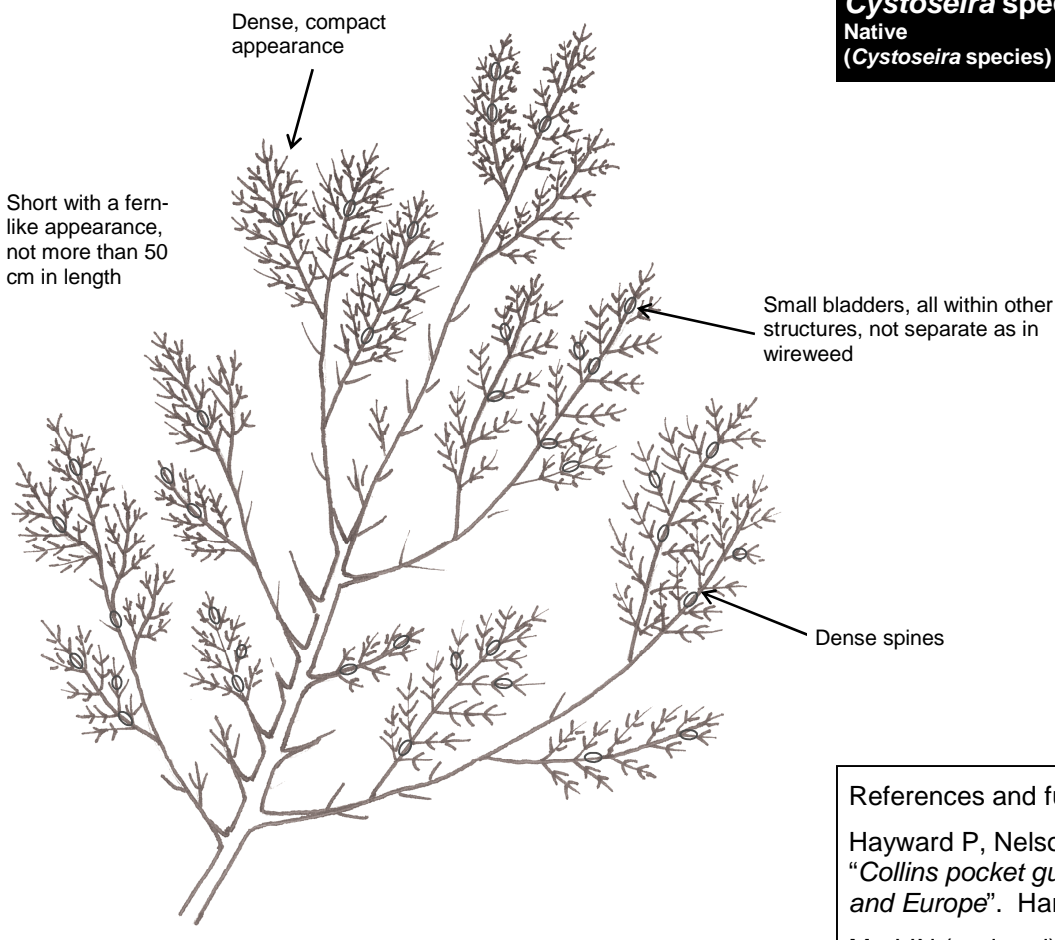


Similar Species

Cystoseira tamariscifolia is small (less than 0.5 m in length). Dense seaweed with many branches covered in spines (other species may lack spines). Dark brown in appearance but with intense blue or green iridescence under water.

Similar to wireweed it is found on shallow shores and in pools and on rocks around the south-west. Other species are similar but lack spines and iridescence.

Cystoseira species
Native
(*Cystoseira* species)



References and further reading:

Hayward P, Nelson-Smith A and Shields C (1996) "*Collins pocket guide to the sea shore of Britain and Europe*". Harper Collins

MarLIN (undated). "*Identification Guide for Selected Marine Non-native Species*". www.marlin.ac.uk