

A-dulsing we will go

The best time to go dulsing is three days after the new moon; that's when you have your highest tides," Alice Galley tells me. Alice should know. She has gathered dulse for over 80 years near Bramber, along the Hants Shore. "Getting a high tide is important," she says, "because the tide has to go a long way out in order to be able to get on the dulse flats."

Dulse (*Palmaria palmata*) is a red seaweed that commonly grows along the coasts of Nova Scotia. It can be found in the intertidal and subtidal areas of the Bay of Fundy, along the French Shore, all the way up to Digby.



The seaweed grows attached to rocks with a disc-shaped holdfast that supports the seaweed's flexible stipe, or stalk, and its leaf-like fronds. Although dulse can grow up to 40 centimetres long, it is usually shorter. It is an important food source and living space for many amphipods (small, shrimp-like creatures) and several species of molluscs.

Dulse may be found year-round. However, "dulsing," the tradition of gathering dulse to eat, usually happens during the warmer, summer months. In earlier times along the Hants Shore, dulsing had to wait until the hay was in, and the farm wagons and horse-teams were free to take folks out to the "flats." Dulse is gathered by hand, put into a bag, preferably a mesh or onion bag, and brought back to shore. On shore, the dulse is laid out flat to dry in the sun, where it turns a deep, brownish-purple colour.

I have heard several variations on how dried dulse can be eaten, including grabbing a handful and munching away, or adding it to soups or chowders. The most common culinary tradition is to toast the dulse on a wood-stove and eat it with fresh baked bread and lots of butter. For centuries, dulse has provided Nova Scotia's dulsers with a very nutritious wild-food, particularly high in iron, and surprisingly low in sodium.

While dulse is able to tolerate moderate human activity within its marine habitat, it does not respond well to prolonged increases in siltation, sedimentation, or pollution. Many dulsers also believe that the impact of fish dragger gear is particularly detrimental to the well-being of dulse habitat, since the seaweed can be torn from its holdfast and, with the churned up water, subjected to increased sedimentation.

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