

What is *Paragorgia arborea*?

Paragorgia belongs to a group called the gorgonian corals. It is bright red or creamy white and has bulbous branch ends, which have led to it becoming known as the 'bubble-gum coral'.

It forms one of the largest gorgonian coral colonies, with mature specimens growing over 3 metres in height. They grow from the ocean bottom, with many branches originating from a central, flexible trunk.

The corals grow in response to the water movement, providing each polyp with as many encounters with prey as possible.

Where can it be found?

It has been found throughout many of the world's oceans, and can both dominate a coral community or co-occur among other corals at depths ranging from 200-1300 metres.

On seamounts and deep shelves, especially at higher latitudes, *Paragorgia* can form magnificent octocoral gardens with other members of the Octocorallia, hosting a plethora of animal life.

Are they really sea trees?

Paragorgia is known in Norway as "Sea trees", and they have been found in Trondheimsfjorden at depths of 50 m. The central trunk looks like a tree trunk but is made of a protein. The trunk's core is surrounded by a softer layer called the rind. Many thousands of polyps live in the rind and extend their bodies through openings to feed. They provide a vertical structure which increases the complexity of the environment, not unlike terrestrial trees. Like trees on land the core of the trunk full of rings - useful to scientists wanting to study its growth back in time.

What are the pictures?

Images from top: The gorgonian coral, *Paragorgia arborea* (© S.W. Ross et al. 2002). A pristine specimen of *Paragorgia arborea* with some squat lobsters living on its branches (© NOAA Ocean Explorer).

This fact-sheet was downloaded from www.lophelia.org and produced for the Deep-sea Conservation for the United Kingdom Project.



***Paragorgia's* creamy white or bright red colour and bulbous branch ends lead it to be known as the "bubble gum" coral.**

