Sea Palm

Postelsia palmaeformis

Postelsia honors Russian artist and scientist Alexander Postels, while palmaeformis describes its resemblance to a palm tree.

WHERE IT'S FOUND

Sea palms' territory stretches only from California's San Luis Obispo to British Columbia's Vancouver Island. Unlike many other seaweeds, its range does not extend to Alaska.

MEET THE SEAWEED

Resembling a miniature palm tree, sea palms have a smooth, slippery trunk and grooved blades that droop down towards the rock face or mussel bed it commonly grows on. When fully exposed at low tide, *Postelsia*'s stout stipe is able to combat gravity and keep the seaweed standing upright. It is the only fleshy seaweed that can do this.

Sea palms are annuals, growing for only one year. To reproduce, spores slide down the palm's slouching blades at low tide and settle into the rock or mussel shells near their parent organism. During winter storms, the parent algae is washed away, making room for the next generation to grow.

A HEALTHY FOOD SOURCE

Called *kakgunu-chale* by Native peoples living at Bodega Head, CA (likely a Coast Miwok term, as the word was interpreted by a Russian naturalist collecting specimens with a Coast Miwok guide), sea palms were collected and dried into cakes. Considered *haskula* – seaweed good for eating – sea palms are rich in iron, magnesium, and potassium, as well as vitamins A, B, and C. *Postelsia*'s blades are sweet-tasting, while its stipe can be pickled.

Due to overharvesting, *Postelsia* is considered a partially protected species in California; a non-Native person must have a commercial license to harvest it. Many coastal tribes have been caring for and actively managing shoreline ecologies for millenia. These tribes are experts on sustainable harvesting techniques, and should be consulted about best practices for stewardship of sea palms and other seaweeds.