

SEA URCHINS

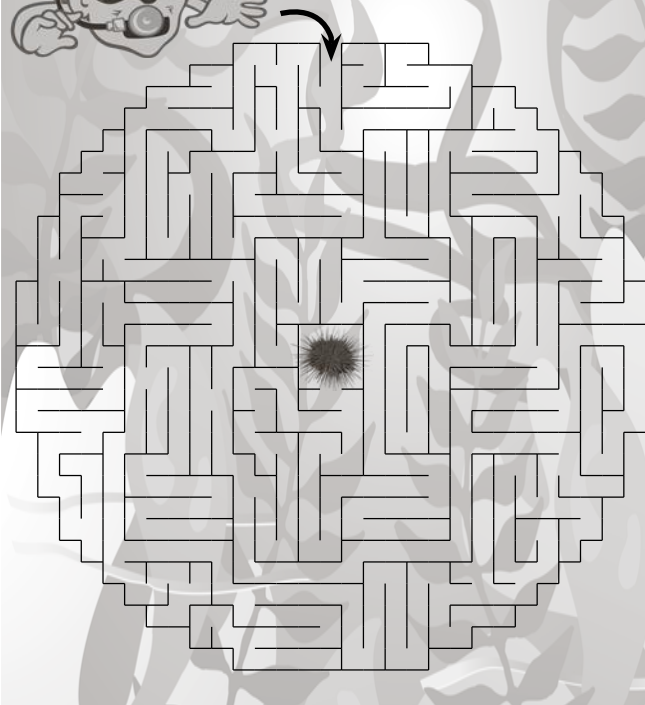
#2

What is bigger than a baseball, has a hard shell with spikes like a porcupine and lives in rocky reefs eating kelp? A sea urchin!

This spiny creature has been one of the most valuable fisheries of the Santa Barbara Channel for more than 20 years. Originally most of the red sea urchins were sold overseas, but now many of the urchins are actually sold in the U.S. The part of the urchin that is eaten is commonly known as "uni." "Uni" is the roe or gonads that are processed from the urchin. The roe is a yellow-orange color, and a popular sushi item. The Fin-atic Reporters got the chance to try fresh uni and most liked it and would like to eat it again.

Sea urchins are not fished from onboard a boat. Instead, they are 'picked' by commercial divers. They use 'hookah,' a type of surface-supplied diving gear. The 'hookah' hose is attached to a compressor on the boat that provides the diver a large supply of air. They do not use Scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) gear because this gear does not provide enough air. The divers use a metal claw called a "rake" to pick the spiny urchins. However, the divers don't take just any urchin. They have to figure out whether the roe quality is good – this takes skill and experience. To determine the quality of the roe the diver opens a few urchins and looks at the roe color and texture. Once quality urchins of legal size are picked, the urchins are kept alive onboard the vessel until delivered to a market or a processor.

Kelp forest maze



Kelp forest maze

Pretend you are a commercial diver for one day. See if you can swim your way through the lush kelp forest maze and find the sea urchin bed.

FUN FACT: What critter was considered a pest before it supported a valuable fishery?



Answer: Sea urchin. In the 1970s, sea urchins were considered a pest because they were destroying kelp beds. They were being poisoned or smashed into pieces to reduce their numbers.

SEA CUCUMBERS

#9

Sea cucumbers are related to the sea urchin and are an invertebrate. However, they have a soft body instead of a hard, external shell. They look like a land slug, only a lot bigger – adults can be more than a foot long! Their bodies are covered with bumps that look like warts, which are called papillae. They are very strange-looking sea creatures.

Sea cucumbers are bottom dwellers. Two species of sea cucumber are fished in the Santa Barbara Channel- the California and the warty sea cucumber. The California sea cucumber is mostly fished using trawl gear, whereas the warty sea cucumber is mostly fished by commercial divers. Sea cucumbers are delivered to processors who typically boil, dry and salt the meat, shipping the final product to specialty markets.

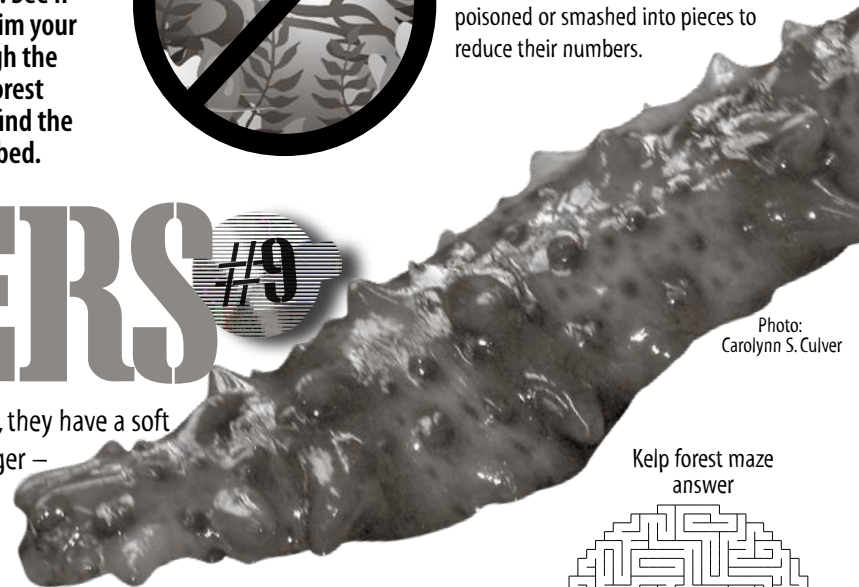


Photo: Carolyn S. Culver

Kelp forest maze answer

