

Caulerpa taxifolia - Killer Algae

Why releasing pets and aquaria just doesn't make sense

In the late 1970s this green marine algae became popular as a fast-growing and decorative tank addition in the saltwater aquarium trade. However, an unintentional release into the Mediterranean Sea in 1984 has proven disastrous, and the plant now sports the nickname “Killer Algae”. Everywhere this plant is found native algal species and seagrasses are overwhelmed and native fish species suffer due to habitat loss and its toxicity to other species. The United States has placed *Caulerpa taxifolia* on the U.S. Federal Noxious Weed List.



Caulerpa taxifolia infestation in U.S. waters

Images: Rachel Woodfield, Merkel & Associates, Inc.,
Bugwood.org

This has greatly heightened the ability for California to act quickly, when a *Caulerpa* infestation was discovered there in 2000. This introduction was linked to a person improperly dumping contents of their aquaria. But even with its listed status this plant continues to be sold for home aquaria and public display at aquariums and museums. Its continued spread occurs in large part because people are unaware of the restrictions, sell it mislabeled, or it is distributed unintentionally mixed in with other plant fragments.

To learn more about *Caulerpa*:

<http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/hcd/caulerpa.htm>

