

# KELP WANTED

BY SALLY BRYSON

With her long fronds of hair, weathered face, and long, green dress, Moon looks like she was born to do her job—she is a seaweed wild-crafter. As the sole proprietor of Sea Breeze Sea Vegetables, she makes her living by harvesting, cleaning, sorting, drying, bagging and selling seaweed.

“I’m my own boss and that’s the way I like it,” she says. “The ocean doesn’t care if I’m late or not.”

Every other Tuesday, Moon makes the trip to the Berkeley Farmers Market to sell seaweed she has gathered from the rocky shores of Mendocino. A steady tide of shoppers arrives at her stand. Some are regulars who add sea vegetables to their baskets along with carrots and avocados. Others pause, curious about the dark-colored strips lined up in bags.

“When it comes to seaweed, you have to have samples,” she says, as a customer with a slight look of trepidation selects a curly, black ribbon from one of Moon’s taster bowls. Evidently he is pleasantly surprised, he leaves with two bags.

Seaweed, in its thousands of varieties, is a staple of the diet in many Asian countries. It is consumed and enjoyed in many other parts of the world, but the growing popularity of sushi restaurants and increased press reports on this primo health food have led to recent swells in seaweed’s popularity. Moon sells several kinds of sea vegetables from sea

palm (her biggest seller) to wakame, nori, kombu and dulse. She also offers a ground up mixture of seaweed in a spice jar that can be used as a condiment. She is keen to chat about methods of preparation and devises many recipes herself, but she says, one of the best things about seaweed is that you do not actually need to prepare it at all. Lots of Moon’s customers open the bag at once and leave her stand already crunching away on this healthy, delicious alternative to a bag of chips.

“I sell a lot of seaweed that is ready to eat,” says Moon. “People like that. It’s instant nutrition.”

Sea vegetables can show off some impressive nutritional statistics. Most varieties contain about a hundred minerals and trace elements, which is more than any land vegetable can claim. They are also an excellent source of protein, and since the composition of seaweed is very close to that of the human body, it is very easily assimilated by humans. Sea vegetables are remarkably rich in calcium and they help to eliminate radiation and toxins from the body. Other properties of seaweed include: building bones, supporting the thyroid, softening tumors, preventing breast cancer, aiding in weight loss, and reducing cholesterol. In fact, we could probably all use a little kelp. And as if these amazing health benefits weren’t reason enough to add a sea vegetable into your five-a-day, consider that this local, seasonal food is also credited with anti-aging properties, promoting beautiful skin and hair, and reducing cellulite.

“I want to encourage people to eat seaweed—it’s a remarkable food,” Moon enthuses. “I know people whose arthritis improved when they started eating seaweed. It’s a wonderful food for nursing mothers, as it’s so rich in minerals. And it made my gray hair recede.”

Moon learned the art of seaweed harvesting from John Lewallen, founder of the Mendocino Sea Vegetable Company. In turn, she wants to introduce other people to the craft, happily inviting anyone who is interested to accompany her on a harvesting trip. The peak time for seaweed harvesting is spring and summer. Harvesting must take place at low tide so wild-crafters pick their way along the rocks at full moon or in the dark of the moon. Seaweed harvesting is a low-tech, time-honored pursuit. The surging ocean is the machine, regulated by lunar cycles rather than computers.

Wearing tennis shoes and zipped into her wetsuit, a penknife attached to her waist on elastic, Moon and her dog, Braedo, clamber over the slippery rocks. Moon usually hauls in around 80 pounds of seaweed per trip before she sorts it and leaves it to dry in the sun. There are two occupational hazards to seaweed harvesting, she explains; First, you have to negotiate the jagged barnacles that knobble the rocks and then of course there are the waves, rolling and pounding, always trying sweep you off. “That happens to me a lot in the spring because that’s when the waves are big, but I sort of like the adrenaline rush!”

Seaweed wildcrafting is more than just a job for Moon. The ocean is a fragile garden and she works according to its timings, seasons and rules. Trying not to impose, she visits gratefully and respectfully to harvest it’s goodness. “I get up, put on my wet suit and I head down to the ocean. That’s my office. I just love it.” ☪

*The recipe at right is adapted from a recipe provided by Ed Bauman, Ph.D. Founder of Bauman College of Holistic Nutrition and Culinary Arts. For more information, visit [www.baumancollege.org](http://www.baumancollege.org).*





## TIPS FOR USING SEA VEGETABLES

ARAME, a dark-brown, leafy seaweed, is rich in protein and calcium. To prepare arame, rinse it, then soak it for 5 minutes in cool water. Boil in water for 5-10 minutes, as if it were pasta. Add to stews, stir-fries and rice dishes.

DULSE is dark red in color. It is one of the richest sources of iron and B vitamins. Dulse may be eaten raw, but when toasted for 5 minutes in a low oven (about 250 degrees), it becomes crisp and smoky, like bacon. Toss it into a salad or stir into soup.

HIJIKI comes in black strands and is extremely high in calcium, iron and vitamin A. Soak it for 20-30 minutes, then simmer for 30-40 minutes before adding it to stews or soups. Mixing it with apple juice or tamari will tone down its strong flavor.

KOMBU is found in dark green strips and is excellent for eliminating radiation from the body. It is also soothing to the digestive tract and helps to regulate blood pressure. Add a strip of kombu to the pot when cooking beans, soup or broth and remove before serving.

NORI is red as it grows in the ocean but turns green when toasted. This is how it looks when sold as the sheets used in sushi rolls. It is very high in protein and B vitamins. It also aids blood pressure and cholesterol. Chop it up and add it to salads or add raw vegetables and hummus and roll it like a burrito.

SEA PALM looks like olive green ribbons. Mixed with nuts, it makes a delicious, raw snack. Alternatively, try soaking it until it expands (about 20 minutes), then use it like pasta with your favorite sauce. (See the recipe for Sea Palm Fettuccine.)

The yellow-brown fronds of WAKAME have a delicate taste. One serving provides our daily-recommended allowance of calcium. To prepare Wakame, soak it for 15 minutes, and then add it to a stew or use it to make a traditional miso soup.

*Moon and her sea vegetables can be found at the Berkeley Farmers Market every other Tuesday through the summer. She can be contacted at (707) 964 4899. Sea vegetables can also be bought online from John Lewallen's Mendocino Sea Vegetable Company at [www.seaweed.net](http://www.seaweed.net). The website features recipes and information about seaweed, as well as links to other resources.*

*Sea vegetables are often featured on the menus of East Bay restaurants such as O Chamé on Fourth Street and Café Gratitude and Cha Ya on Shattuck Avenue.*

## SEA PALM FETTUCCINE WITH PUMPKIN SEED PESTO

*When you add water to sea palm fronds, they expand from thin, crunchy sticks to long, flat, bands—like fettuccine! You can then use them like pasta with your favorite sauce. In this recipe, the tangy Pumpkin Seed Pesto is the perfect condiment to the darker flavor of sea palm. For a heartier dish, add zucchini or other Italian style vegetables. .*

### PUMPKIN SEED PESTO

1 cup pumpkin seeds  
1 bunch of cilantro  
2 tablespoons. olive oil / flax oil  
2 cloves garlic (crushed)  
Juice of 1 lemon  
Sea salt to taste

### SEA PALM FETTUCCINE

2 oz. sea palm fronds  
3 cloves garlic (chopped finely)  
2 tablespoons ghee or olive oil  
2 ½ cups of water  
2 red bell peppers (chopped)  
(Add other chopped vegetables such as zucchini)  
¼ cup pine nuts  
Sea salt, lemon to taste.  
Cilantro for garnish

#### To make the pesto:

Puff pumpkin seeds on stove over heat for 1-2 minutes. Combine all pesto ingredients into a food processor and blend until smooth. Add salt to taste.

#### To make the fettuccine:

Freshen sea palm fronds by soaking them in water for 20 minutes (use a large bowl as they expand when re-hydrated.) Meanwhile, toast the pine nuts for 3-4 minutes on the stove. Drain the sea palm. Heat the olive oil or ghee in a saucepan and sauté the sea palm fronds for 3 minutes with the garlic. Add water and simmer until tender (about 10 minutes).

Meanwhile, sauté the bell peppers and vegetables. When the sea palm fronds are tender, drain and add them to the vegetables. Stir in the toasted pine nuts. Add lemon juice and salt to taste. Top with a dollop of pesto and garnish with cilantro. Serves 4

