

# Wireweed

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## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Sargassum muticum*

**AKA:** Japweed, Strangle weed, Japanese seaweed

**Native to:** North-western Pacific shores

**Habitat:** Hard surfaces in shallow coastal water rarely deeper than 5 m

Not to be confused with the terrestrial plant, Wireweed (*Polygonum aviculare*).

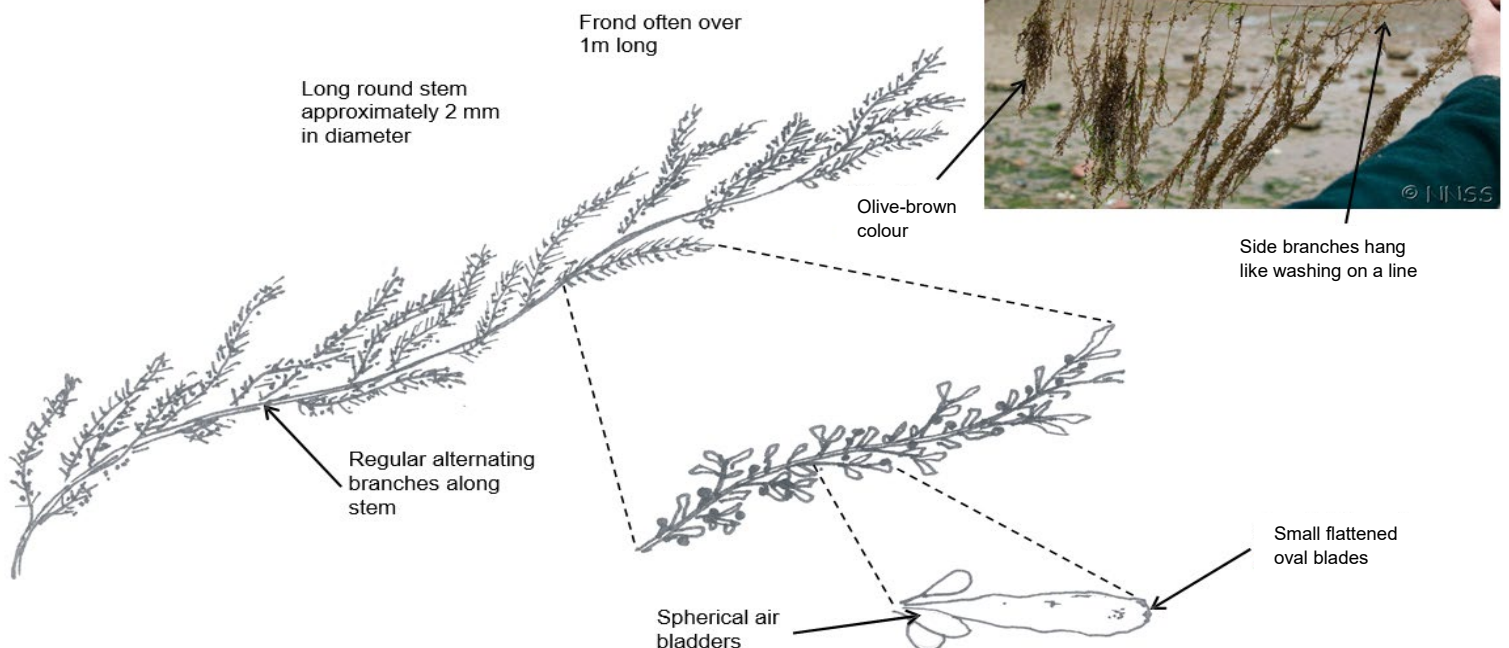
An invasive non-native seaweed which probably arrived to Northern Ireland with oyster spat introduced for commercial purposes. Due to its very fast growth rate (up to 10 cm per day) and production of numerous spores it can spread rapidly, approximately 30 km per year along the coast. It prefers warmer waters, but will tolerate a wide range of temperatures and salinity including estuarine conditions. *Sargassum muticum* can grow up to 16 m in length, forming floating mats on the sea surface.

The species can occupy hard substrates on sheltered shores where it can form dense monospecific stands excluding other species. Dense *S. muticum* stands can reduce the available light for understory species, dampen water flow, increase sedimentation rates and reduce ambient nutrient concentrations available for native species.

***Sargassum muticum* is listed under Schedule 9 of The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and as such, it is an offence to plant or otherwise allow this species to grow in the wild.**



## Key ID Features



Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

## Identification throughout the year

Branches die in autumn leaving only a small holdfast (the part of the plant which looks superficially like roots and anchors it to hard surfaces).

## Field Signs

Fragments of wireweed can be found washed up on beaches mixed in with the flotsam.



## Distribution

Originally introduced into the Isle of Wight, now spreading along coast of England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland.

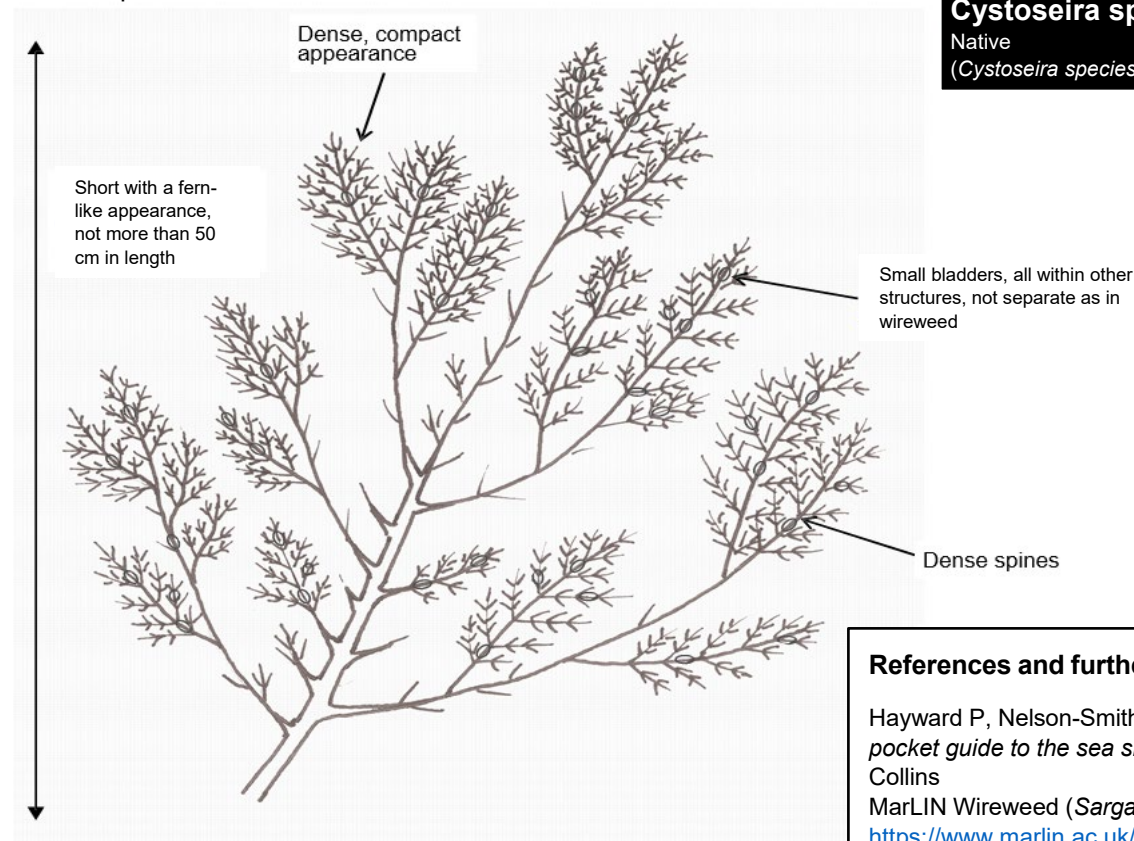


Source: MarLIN undated

## Similar Species

*Cystoseira tamariscifolia* is small (less than 0.5 m in length). Dense seaweed with many branches covered in spines (other species may lack spines). Dark brown in appearance but with intense blue or green iridescence under water.

Similar to wireweed it is found on shallow shores and in pools and on rocks around the south-west. Other species are similar but lack spines and iridescence.



### References and further reading:

Hayward P, Nelson-Smith A and Shields C (1996) "*Collins pocket guide to the sea shore of Britain and Europe*". Harper Collins  
MarLIN Wireweed (*Sargassum munticum*) species list  
<https://www.marlin.ac.uk/species/detail/1477>  
Photos from: Philip Ames, Alison Jukes, Chris Wood

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Adapted for Northern Ireland  
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