



Grass shrimp

What are they?

Grass shrimp are tiny shrimp, sometimes called “popcorn shrimp” because of their size. Like crabs, and lobsters, they are crustaceans. Crustaceans are animals that have protective hard outer shells. All crustaceans also have jointed legs.

What do they look like?

Grass shrimp are very small. Even the adults are usually less than two inches long.

The first two pair of legs on a grass shrimp looks like tiny claws. Their heads end in a pointed part called a rostrum. Their rostrums have teeth along the edges.

You can see right through their transparent bodies. In fact, they only have a few spots of color on different parts of their bodies. Their heads are longer than the rest of their bodies.



Photo Source: National Aquarium

Where can you find them?

As do many shrimp, young grass shrimp love to hide out in the Bay’s seagrass meadows and weed beds. However, it might be hard to find these tiny creatures since they are almost colorless.

Grass shrimp can be found throughout the Bay. However, they tend to stay away from the mouth of the Bay because the water there is so salty.

How do they behave?

Female grass shrimp carry their eggs in a special pouch. When the eggs hatch, these small shrimp go through a larval stage when they are called zoea, just like young blue crabs. The larvae go through a series of stages of development until they mature.

Some people have reported that grass shrimp sometimes leap out of shallow waters. However, these tiny creatures spend most of their time under water, protected by the Bay grasses and plants found there.

As grass shrimp grow, they molt. They shed their outer skeleton. A new, softer skeleton takes its place. In a short period of time, the soft shell grows hard.

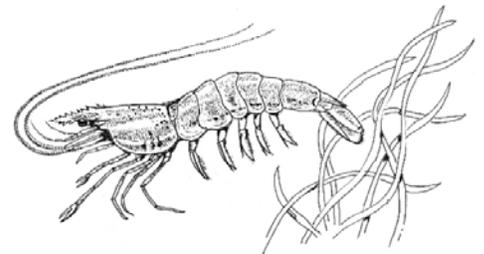
Grass shrimp are scavengers. They eat dead and decaying plant and animal life, breaking it down for other animals. This action helps keep the water clean and free of debris.

What do they eat?

The zoea of grass shrimp float about on the tides, eating other zooplankton, algae, and dead or decaying plant or animal life (called detritus). Adults have a much wider diet. They eat algae, small worms, and other small crustaceans.

What eats them?

Grass shrimp are eaten by fish such as young striped bass, white perch, spotted seatrout, and red drum.



Creature Feature

Although grass shrimp look very fragile, they play an important role in a number of food chains throughout the Bay. Even their waste is useful. It is full of nutrients that are an important food source for other members of their food chains.