



Sea nettles – Jellyfish with a Sting

What are they?

Sea nettles are the largest zooplankton in the Bay.

What do they look like?

Like their cousins, the lion's mane and moon jellyfish, sea nettles have a ring of tentacles that stream down from their bells. The tentacles are loaded with hundreds of stinging cells. When they come in contact with an animal (or human), the stinging cells release a barb that sticks under the skin. Toxins (poisons produced by the sea nettle) travel down the barb and stun the victim so the nettle can easily eat it.

Their bells (the upper whitish part of the nettle) can be as large as eight inches in diameter. Their tentacles may extend four or five feet beyond the bell.

Where can you find them?

Since sea nettles like saltier waters, you can find them in the middle and lower Bay and all the rivers that feed into this part of the Bay. They begin to appear when the weather gets warm, and stay around until the weather—and the water—starts to turn cooler in the late fall.

If you'd like to see a map of current sea nettle distribution, look [here](http://coastwatch.noaa.gov/seanettles/).
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How do they behave?

Sea nettles can move by contracting and expanding their bell. However, they are not strong swimmers. They depend on the movement of the current and tides to travel the farthest. That is why they are part of the zooplankton family.

What do they eat?

Sea nettles eat constantly. They love to eat other forms of zooplankton, especially comb jellies and fish larvae. Although nettles eat oyster larvae, they spit them out undigested, leaving the young oysters unharmed.

What eats them?

Since nettles are almost 90% water, most animals don't find them a good food source. Some fishes and sea turtles do feed on them.

Creature Feature

Jellyfish are neither made of jelly, nor are they fish. They look like they might be made of clear or milky jelly, and that's the way some of them feel when you pick them up. But they are not fish. Why do you think they got this name?



Photo Source: Joseph Doherty, Cal Images

