

What are algae?

Have you ever seen algae growing in a fish tank or at the edge of a pond? Algae (pronounced “AL-jee”) might look like plants, but are not. They are living organisms, but they have no leaves, roots, or flowers and they usually live in water. There are many kinds of algae—from microscopic ones you can’t even see to giant seaweed 200 feet tall. Algae make their own food using sunlight just like plants do. This process is called photosynthesis.

Algae are important because they are used for food, animal feed, fertilizer and are even put in some beauty products. Scientists at Montana State University are even growing algae that produce fuel. They hope by studying algae, they can discover a way to make fuel that would replace the gasoline that powers our cars and planes now.

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TRY THIS

Grow your own algae and experiment to see what will help it grow.

- Take a water sample from a fish tank, pond, or even an outdoor dog bowl or water trough. Try to find a place where you can see some green slime growing. Better yet, try and find a small rock with some green slime on it. If you can, get two samples from two different locations.
- Put the samples in small containers with some room temperature water and place them near a window where they can get lots of sunlight.
- Try putting more rocks and a small piece of lettuce in one of the containers. This will help the algae grow.

Watch the algae for two weeks. Did the algae grow? What happened in the containers?

You can also try this experiment with two types of water: tap water and bottled water. Which one do you think would work better? You could also add some Miracle-Gro plant food and see what happens.



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