

Open for tasteful nudibranchs Σ Inbox x

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 **Monterey Bay Aquarium**



Spanish shawl (*Flabellina iodinea*) photo by Kate Vylet

Take a Peek at These Gorgeous Creatures

It's nudibranch (NEW-dih-brank) week, and we can't think of a better creature to feature. Nudibranchs are undersea invertebrates that are anywhere from a quarter of an inch to a foot long and can weigh up to 3.3 pounds—looking at you, sea hares! While the first thing you think about "slugs" might be anything but beautiful, nudibranchs boast some of the most vivid colors and patterns of any sea-dwelling animal.

Impress your friends and family with the following facts about the magnificent nudibranch family:





Clockwise starting at top left: sorcerer's slug (*Polycera atra*) photo by Kate Vylet, Cockerell's dorid (*Limacia cockerelli*) photo by Phil Lemley, lion's mane nudibranch (*Melibe leonina*) photo by Michelle Manson, sea lemon (*Peltodoris nobilis*)

You are what you eat! Nudibranchs' beautifully unique colors often come from the colorful food they munch on: sponges, tunicates, hydroids, anemones and even other sea slugs! Their diverse and specialized diet has another advantage: it makes them taste bad to other predators. Their striking colors also serve as a warning for would-be slug chompers.



Opalescent nudibranchs (*Hermisenda opalescens*) photo by Michael Alyono

Opalescent nudibranchs are aggressive fighters when food is scarce. When two of them meet head-to-head, they're likely to lunge into a biting battle. If one meets the tail of another and gets the first bite, it usually wins the battle and consumes the loser.

Rough date!



Lion's mane nudibranch (*Melibe leonina*)

Because nudibranchs have relatively short lifespans, they have to grow and reproduce quickly. A meeting between two or more can be a mutual mating session, since these creatures are all hermaphroditic (they have both male and female sexual organs). The reproductive organs are all on their right side, because while these slugs appear symmetrical on the surface, they're internally asymmetric, a result of their bodies "unwinding" from their ancestral snail form.



Hopkins rose nudibranch (*Okenia rosacea*)

Nudibranch means "naked gills." Dorid

nudibranchs like the Hopkins rose have tufts of gill plumes that project like a bunny's tail from their

backside. Aeolid nudibranchs, like *Hermisenda*,

have gills that take the shape of many projections on

their backs called cerata. The "ears" of a nudibranch

are actually its noses, called rhinophores. Rhinophore

appearance varies wildly across nudibranchs, from

looking like a bouquet of flowers to the antennae of a

moth.

For more beautiful photos and amazing facts about these jelly-bodied residents of the sea, join us on social media all week long for special sea slug features!

