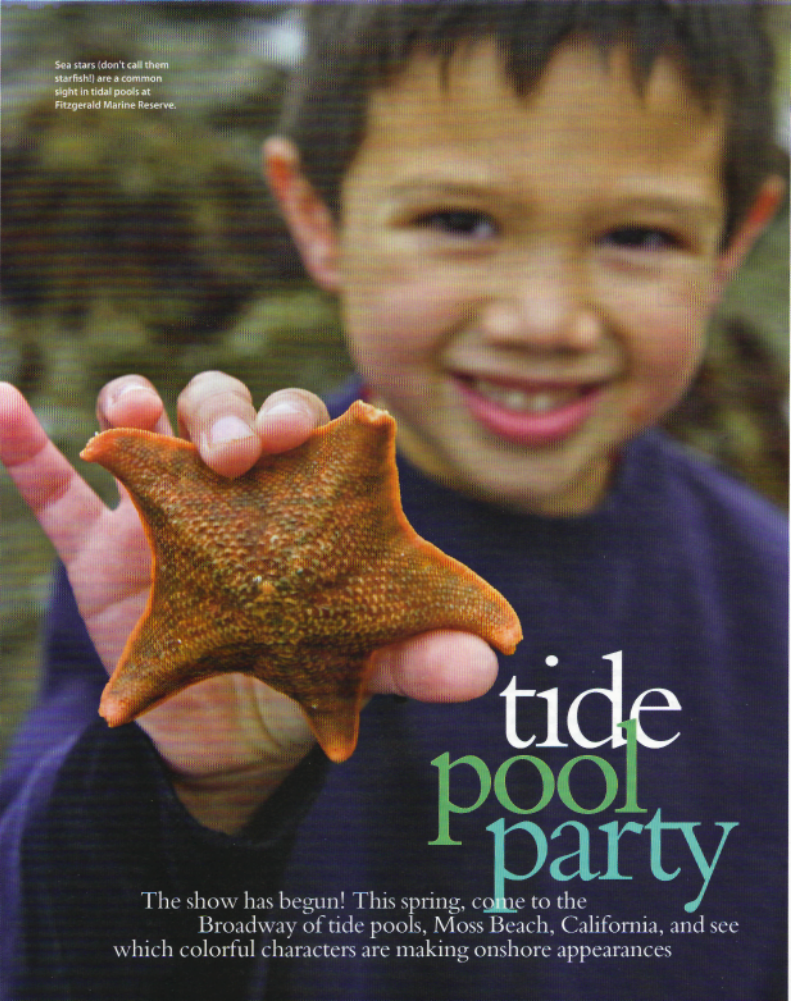


Sea stars (don't call them
starfish!) are a common
sight in tidal pools at
Fitzgerald Marine Reserve.



tide pool party

The show has begun! This spring, come to the
Broadway of tide pools, Moss Beach, California, and see
which colorful characters are making onshore appearances



Peer down into a tide pool and you'll find a miniature universe teeming with life. Tiny hermit crabs skulk along exposed rock, skittering sideways from one crevice to the next. The tentacles of chartreuse sea anemones sway in the currents like fans at a rock concert. Resembling purple pincushions, sea urchins abound, creating nature's most spectacular minifield. On occasion, the rotund heads of California sea lions poke out of the retreating tide to watch the humans go by.

All of this unfolds less than 30 miles from San Francisco at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach, California. The awe-inspiring stretch extends for about three miles. During the lowest tides—from December to June—the moon's gravitational pull on the Pacific exposes acres of the reserve's sedimentary rock, leaving pools of seawater in the cracks that remain. Wide-eyed and giddy, 8-year-old Milena Musgrave can't believe the bright, multitentacled sea anemone she's found. "Look at it!" she says. "It's like spaghetti, only green!"

Fitzgerald is home to hundreds of animal and plant species. "This is definitely not a beach for sand castles," says park ranger Steve Durkin. "It's a living museum where you can get up close and personal with animals you probably never knew existed."

Walking across the slippery rocks is a sensory overload. Bubble gum-colored sea stars catch your eye as they move in slow motion in the pools below. The scent of drying surf grass fills your nose, and you can practically taste the salty air. The gentle waves produce a natural white noise that calms and rejuvenates, no matter how much of it you hear.

On weekends, rangers and volunteers stationed along the tide pools point out noteworthy sights, like a sculpin acting unfishlike as it camouflages in a pile of sand, or iridescent algae that looks like oil sheen on kelp. They also offer details on everything from how frequently spiderlike hermit crabs slough their shells (about once a year) to the 24-legged sunflower star's favorite snack (sea urchin).

Moss Beach resident Caroline Morton visits the reserve regularly with her children, Joaquin, 6, and Nina, 2. "It's always better to get to know things by interacting with them," she says. "I can't think of a better way to learn."

For more info on Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, call 650/728-3584 or visit fitzgeraldreserve.org.

the essentials

WHERE ELSE TO GO

- **Acadia National Park, Maine** In June, September, and October, park rangers lead the "Life Between the Tides" walk. Expect to find: sea urchins, common periwinkle, and Northern sea stars; nps.gov/acad.
- **Olympic National Park, Washington** The cold, nutrient-rich waters off the state's northwest coast support tons of sea life. Expect to find: spiny purple and red sea urchins, and sea cucumbers; nps.gov/olymp.
- **Cape Cod National Seashore, Massachusetts** Warmer waters attract families to catch minnows in pails or look for hermit crabs. Expect to find: sea stars, clams, and horseshoe crabs; nps.gov/caco.

- **Redwood National Park, California**

Ranger-led tide pool walks meet at Enderts Beach's parking area and last 2½ hours.

Expect to find: giant green anemones, volcano-shaped limpets, and orange and purple ochre sea stars; nps.gov/redw.



Wellington Rain Boots in Red, Hunter; zappos.com



Women's Kelly parka in Aztec Gold; landsend.com

WHAT TO PACK

Tide pooling is a great way to get to know sea life, but it requires patience and the proper gear. Here's what to bring on your next sea creature adventure.

- **Boots:** It's slick! Make sure your footwear has nonskid soles.
- **Rain gear:** Weather on every coast from Maine to Washington can change quickly. Be prepared for brisk winds and rain.
- **Magnifying glass:** Some tide pool critters are no bigger than a grain of rice. Make sure you can see all of them.

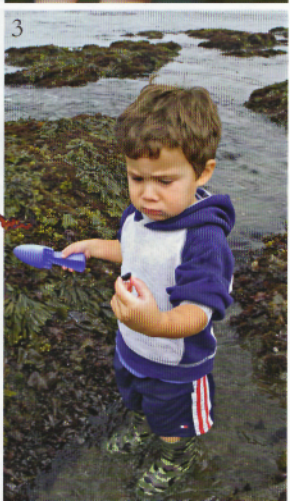
■ **Field guide:** If you can't find a naturalist, consult a field guide to learn about animals you can't identify right away.


WHAT TO KNOW

- **Hide, don't seek.** Observe ocean life unobtrusively. "Visitors will see so much more if they remain quiet," ranger Steve Durkin says. "Sit silently at the edge of a tide pool and the marine life will come out of hiding."
- **Respect the environment.** Rules vary from park to park, so read the signs—Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, for example, is strictly no dogs allowed. Steve recommends making a reservation if you're a group of more than 10 people. And always keep in mind that you're seeing the marine plants and animals in their natural habitat. "Gently touching the creatures is OK, but poking at them with sticks or other items is not," he says.
- **Be safe.** Watch for the incoming surf—tides change quickly. "Walk slowly and carefully on the rocky reefs," Steve adds. "Seaweed is slippery!"



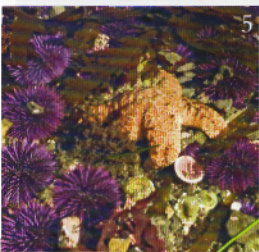
Magnifying glass and tin, Haba; hazelnut kids.com





LOW TIDES MAKE IT
EASIER TO DISCOVER
SEA CREATURES. COME
HIGH TIDE, THEY'RE
LIKELY TO MOVE ON

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5



6

everyone in the pool!

1 Neon green sea anemones abound at Fitzgerald Marine Reserve. **2** Tiny crabs and other critters mingle in the shallow waters. **3** Tide pools contain many confounding creatures. **4** The pools offer a chance to see marine life well back from the crashing surf. **5** A hungry sea star finds its favorite food: purple sea urchins. **6** Ranger Steve Durkin explains the life of a gastropod to curious onlookers. **7** At low tide, the pools near Moss Beach teem with humans. **8** Bright orange sea anemones. **9** Waterproof boots keep little feet dry. ☀



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