Dive into the delicious possibilities sea vegetables offer.

If the term "sea vegetables" makes you think of kelp that squishes between your toes at low tide, it's time to catch the wave of these true wonder foods.

Sea vegetables are a rich food source of iodine, a trace mineral that's crucial for healthy thyroid function. "Seaweed is also used to help balance female hormones, and in traditional Chinese medicine, to treat fibrocystic breast disease and uterine fibroids," says Terry Grossman, MD, coauthor of Transcend: Nine Steps to Living Well Forever.

When properly prepared, sea vegetables have a firm, chewy texture and a rich, salty flavor. Try them in the following recipes, and experiment with several varieties in your everyday cooking; you'll love what the tide brings in.

deep sea treasures
Carrot, Wakame, and Kale Stew
Serves 6 | Vegan | Gluten Free

This winter stew is a great way to sneak sea vegetables into a recipe; the wakame gets mixed up in the kale, so picky eaters won't even know it's there. After soaking the wakame, taste a small piece; if it seems too salty, repeat the soaking process a second time.

1 cup wakame
1 Tbs. olive oil
1 small yellow onion, diced (¾ cup)
2 small carrots, diced (½ cup)
1 celery rib, diced (¼ cup)

1 15-oz. can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
1½ cups frozen baby lima beans, thawed
6 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
1 bunch kale (12 oz.), trimmed and chopped (6 cups)
⅛ tsp. dried oregano
⅛ tsp. ground nutmeg
⅛ tsp. cayenne pepper

1. Place wakame in small bowl, cover with cold water, and soak 15 minutes, or until soft. Drain, squeeze out liquid, and set aside.

2. Heat oil in saucepan over medium heat. Add onion, carrots, and celery, and sauté 3 to 5 minutes, or until tender. Add cannellini beans, lima beans, and broth. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer, covered, 10 minutes.

3. Transfer half of soup to food processor, and purée until smooth. Stir mixture into remaining soup in pot, and add kale. Cook 5 minutes more, or until kale is tender. Stir in oregano, nutmeg, cayenne, and drained wakame.

PER 1-CUP SERVING: 177 CAL; 8 G PROT. 3 G TOTAL FAT (<1 G SAT FAT); 30 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 452 MG SOD; 9 G FIBER; 5 G SUGARS
Roasted Brussels Sprouts Medley with Nori Strips
SERVES 6 | VEGAN | GLUTEN FREE

Finely sliced nori sheets add smoky flavor and crunch to roasted winter vegetables.

2½ cups Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved
2 small red onions, cut into eighths (1½ cups)
1 medium sweet potato, cubed (1½ cups)
3 small parsnips, sliced (1¼ cups)
1½ cups whole baby carrots
10 cloves garlic, peeled and lightly crushed
2 Tbs. olive oil
2 sheets toasted nori
½ cup chopped, toasted hazelnuts
1 Tbs. toasted walnut oil

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Coat baking sheet with cooking spray.
2. Toss together Brussels sprouts, onions, sweet potato, parsnips, carrots, garlic, and olive oil in large bowl, making sure vegetables are coated with oil. Transfer vegetables to prepared baking sheet, and roast 35 to 45 minutes, or until vegetables are tender and browned, stirring halfway through.
3. Meanwhile, cut or tear each nori sheet into 4 rectangles (you should have 8 pieces). Stack pieces on top of one another, and slice into thin strips.
4. Transfer vegetables to large serving bowl, and toss with hazelnuts, walnut oil, and nori strips. Season with salt and pepper, if desired.

PER 1-CUP SERVING: 201 CAL, 4 G PROT, 11 G TOTAL FAT (1 G SAT FAT), 24 G CARB, 0 MG CHOL, 64 MG SOD, 5 G FIBER, 7 G SUGARS

Arame-Vegetable Strudels
SERVES 6 | VEGAN

Thin strands of soaked arame lend flavor and texture to this light and healthful main dish.

¼ cup arame
¼ cup plus 1 Tbs. olive oil, divided
1¼ cups diced portobello mushrooms
1 cup broccoli florets, chopped small
1 cup cauliflower florets, chopped small
1 small leek, chopped (¼ cup)
2 medium carrots, diced (¼ cup)
2 cloves garlic, minced (2 tsp.)
1 cup roasted red peppers, rinsed and drained
⅓ cup chopped sun-dried tomatoes
¼ cup silken tofu, drained
12 frozen phyllo pastry sheets, thawed
Fresh rosemary sprigs for garnish, optional

Roasted Brussels Sprouts Medley with Nori Strips
Like dried spices, sea vegetables will remain fresh for up to a year when stored in a cool, dark, dry cupboard.

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Place arame in bowl, and cover with cold water. Soak 10 minutes, or until soft. Drain, and set aside.
2. Heat 1 Tbs. oil in skillet over medium heat. Add mushrooms, broccoli, cauliflower, leek, and carrots; sauté 5 to 7 minutes, or until vegetables are tender. Stir in garlic, and cook 1 minute more. Stir in arame; season with salt and pepper, if desired. Remove from heat, and spread mixture on plate to cool.
3. Puree roasted red peppers, sun-dried tomatoes, tofu, and sherry in blender or food processor 1 to 2 minutes, or until smooth, adding 1 or 2 Tbs. water, if necessary, to thin. Transfer to saucepan.
4. Place 2 sheets phyllo dough on work surface, and brush with olive oil. Stack 2 more phyllo sheets on top, and brush with oil. Top with 2 more phyllo sheets. Spread half of mushroom mixture onto phyllo stack, leaving ½-inch border on each long side and covering one-third of phyllo stack. Fold long edges of phyllo over filling; roll into log lengthwise, enclosing filling completely. Repeat with remaining phyllo sheets and filling.
5. Coat baking sheet with cooking spray. Place Strudels on baking sheet, and bake 30 to 35 minutes, or until golden brown. Meanwhile, warm red pepper sauce.
6. To serve: Spoon ¼ cup red pepper sauce on each plate. Cut each Strudel into thirds, and place one piece of Strudel in center of sauce. Garnish with chopped fresh parsley, for garnish.

PER SERVING (1 SLICE STRUDEL AND ⅓-CUP SAUCE):
265 CAL; 12 G PROT; 15 G TOTAL FAT (2 G SAT FAT); 30 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 399 MG SOD; 5 G FIBER; 5 G SUGARS

Wild Rice, Shiitake, and Hijiki Salad

SERVES 4 | VEGAN

East meets West in this salad laced with goji berries, tempeh, and shiitake mushrooms and seasoned with soy sauce and sesame oil.

1. Place hijiki in bowl, cover with cold water, and soak 10 minutes, or until soft. Drain, squeeze out liquid, and set aside.
2. Bring broth to a boil in large saucepan. Add wild rice, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer, covered, 40 to 45 minutes, or until tender. Remove lid, and simmer, uncovered, 5 minutes more. Drain excess liquid.
3. Heat vegetable oil in skillet over medium heat. Add mushrooms and shallots, and sauté 3 to 5 minutes, or until mushrooms are just soft.
4. Stir in tempeh, tamari, and ginger. Cover, and cook 7 minutes, stirring frequently.
5. Stir in toasted sesame oil, goji berries, and hijiki. Transfer to large bowl, and stir in wild rice. Season with salt and pepper, if desired, and stir in pecans. Serve hot or cold, garnished with chopped parsley.

PER 1-CUP SERVING: 284 CAL; 12 G PROT; 15 G TOTAL FAT (2 G SAT FAT); 31 G CARB; 0 MG CHOL; 394 MG SOD; 5 G FIBER; 5 G SUGARS

Lisa Turner is a food writer and chef in Boulder, Colo. She has been cooking with sea vegetables since 1994, when she fell in love with them at the Kushi Institute in Massachusetts.