learning the ropes

- **Agar-Agar (AY-gar)** Also called kanten in Japan, agar-agar is a natural jelling alternative that is virtually tasteless. It is used to make gelatin-type desserts and aspics and is available in flakes or bars. Agar-agar is especially rich in iodine.

- **Alaria (a-LAH-ree-ah):** This sea vegetable is harvested from the eastern seaboard of North America; once dried it is black or dark green in color. It's high in calcium, vitamin A and B vitamins. Alaria is good in stews and grain dishes and can also be used in miso soup instead of the traditional wakame.

- **Arame (AR-ah-may):** A mild-tasting sea vegetable from Japan with a delicate, almost sweet flavor. It is especially good in soups, or combined with tofu or vegetables. Arame is rich in calcium and iodine.

- **Carrageen (KEHR-ah-geen):** Also called Irish moss, carrageen is used as a thickening agent in soups, stews and sauces, as well as in several commercial products. It also has been used medicinally to treat digestive and urinary disorders and chronic chest infections. Carrageen is rich in minerals, especially iodine, as well as vitamin A.

- **Dulse (duh-liss):** Reddish in color with a soft, chewy texture, dulse can be eaten right out of the package or cooked quickly and added to recipes. It has a salty, spicy flavor and can be used in salads and stir-fries or lightly fried and eaten as a snack. It is native to the North Atlantic coasts and has a long history in northern European cultures. Extremely high in protein, iron and vitamin B6 (one cup provides 100 percent of the RDA for iron and B6), dulse is also rich in vitamin B12, potassium and fluoride. When fried, it makes a delicious bacon alternative in a BLT sandwich. Its appealing taste makes it a good introductory sea vegetable for beginners and children.

- **Hijiki (hee-JE-kee):** This sea vegetable is one of the strongest-tasting variations. It is often sautéed with vegetables or used in soups, and it pairs particularly well with onions and root vegetables. In its dehydrated form, hijiki resembles black strings. Extraordinarily high in calcium and iron, it expands up to five times its dry volume when cooked, so keep that in mind when measuring out.

- **Kelp:** The kelps are large brown seaweeds that grow together in underwater forests. They are used in soups and stews, stir-fried with vegetables or cooked with beans or grains. Kelp cooks quickly and dissolves in longer-cooking dishes. High in calcium, potassium, magnesium and iron, kelp is also a good source of chromium and iodine. It can be pre-soaked or added dry to foods with liquids. Kelp expands up to five times its dry weight when it is used in liquid.

- **Kombu (KOHM-boo):** This Japanese seaweed is used to make dashi, an Asian soup stock, and to flavor rice and stews. Usually sold dried, in strips or in sheets, it is dark green, almost black in color. Kombu is often called "natural MSG" and is used to boost the flavor of broths, soups, stews and grains and tenderize beans.

- **Laver (LAY-vuh):** Indigenous to the North Atlantic, laver is purplish black in color and related to nori. It's especially good dry-roasted to bring out its nutty flavor. It can then be crumbled and used as a nutritious condiment to sprinkle over soups, salads or grain dishes. Laver has a long history in the British Isles, where it is combined with rolled oats and fried as a breakfast bread.

- **Nori (NOH-ree):** Belonging to the laver family of sea vegetables, nori is deep purple in color but turns dark green when toasted. It is noted for its role in sushi-making and is available in ready-to-use sheets. It can also be chopped or crumbled to use in soups and salads.

- **Wakame (WAH-kah-may):** Leafy and mild in flavor, wakame turns green after soaking. Traditionally added to miso soup, wakame is also good with other vegetables or in salads, stir-fries or rice dishes. It is rich in calcium, with high levels of B vitamins and vitamin C.