

A recent trend in vegan culture is sea moss. But what you may not know is there are multiple kinds of sea moss. The two main types - Genus Gracilaria (Sea Moss) and Chondrus Crispus (Irish Moss) - each have their own advantages and disadvantages.

What is sea moss?

The term sea moss is actually just a way to refer to different species of seaweed. Some even say it's algae. However, the term "sea moss" has stuck and is what you'll commonly see when buying sea moss.

While there are thousands of species of sea moss in the ocean, there are two that are most popular today, and, as we've already mentioned, they are Genus Gracilaria and Chondrus Crispus. As you add a type of sea moss to your diet, it's important to be able to tell the difference between the two. Let's take an in depth look at each form of sea moss.

Genus Gracilaria ("Sea Moss")

This is the most popularly sold form of sea moss, though it's important to know that sometimes companies innocently mistake it for the other kind of sea moss we will talk about, commonly known as "Irish Moss."

One of the main differences between "Sea Moss" and "Irish Moss" is where it's grown. Genus Gracilaria tends to grow in warmer climates, most popularly in Jamaica and St. Lucia. While it isn't exclusively grown in those areas, you will likely see those locations when buying your Genus Gracilaria. It grows on both rocks and ropes, though it usually only grows on ropes if it's formed in an ocean or pool.

Identifying Genus Gracilaria

The physical look of Genus Gracilaria is a yellow-gold colored thin stringy presentation. In a bag of Genus Gracilaria, you may see some reddish strands, which is a normal variation in nature. You may even see some sea moss that is blue and purple. If you see a lot of purple in your sea moss, you may have "Jamaican Purple Sea Moss." This is another time it may be mistaken for "Irish Moss," which is a whole other species of sea moss.

Benefits of Genus Gracilaria

One of the major benefits of using Genus Gracilaria is the high nutrient content and that it grows year round. This means it will usually be more available and the cost will typically be lower. However, because it is becoming more popular and is considered by some to be a “super food,” some companies are sadly increasing their prices exponentially. When purchasing Genus Gracilaria, it shouldn’t cost more than \$30 for 1/4-pound.

Disadvantages of Genus Gracilaria

Because sea moss in general is becoming so popular, we are starting to see “Farmed Pool Grown Sea Moss,” which isn’t ideal. This is mainly because the formation of the sea moss is rushed and tends to be grown inorganically. Because sea moss only grows naturally in places where the sea is moving, pool-grown sea moss won’t have the same nutritional benefits, plus you could be eating whatever the company is putting into their pool to speed up the formation of the sea moss. This can also deplete the nutrient content.

Think of it like wild-grown vegetables vs non-organically grown farm produce. One will have all the natural nutritional properties of the fruits and vegetables, while the other may include chemicals that make the plant grow larger and faster. But while there are clear benefits to wild-grown sea moss, pool-grown sea moss still has nutritional benefits, so you have to use your own discretion when purchasing.

Chondrus Crispus (“Irish Moss”)

The name “Irish Moss” or “Irish Sea Moss” comes from its important history during the Irish Potato Famine in the 1800s. It was one of the seaweeds the Irish ate during the famine and was considered a survival food. Today, it is a superfood powerhouse, still grown along the coast of Ireland, as well as Great Britain, Maine, Canada, and other places with cooler waters.

Supply for Irish moss can sometimes be limited, mainly because it doesn’t grow on ropes, meaning it isn’t often a farmed food. It only grows on rocks, so it tends to only be harvested from the natural oceans.

Identifying Chondrus Crispus

“Irish Moss” has a more fan-like, flat shape, especially compared to Genus Gracilaria. It could be compared to leaves or flowers. The color is typically a dark purple, but as we’ve seen with Genus Gracilaria, there can be some variations, sometimes lighter purples but even green

“leafs” in the same bag. Don’t shy away from a bag of Chondrus Crispus because of a natural color variation - it doesn’t change the nutritional components.

Because “Jamaican Purple Sea Moss” is often confused with “Irish Sea Moss” because of the purple color, it’s important to pay attention to the shape of the “leafs” and strands of the sea moss. Remember that solely using color isn’t a good way to identify your species of sea moss. Shape along with color will give you a better chance of properly identifying the species.

Advantages of Chondrus Crispus

“Irish Moss” is rare and not available year round. In fact, it’s only harvested in the summer time. Plus, it’s only grown on rocks. So the main advantage of Chondrus Crispus is there aren’t really any “fake” or pool-grown products out there.

Another advantage is the mineral and nutrient content in “Irish Moss.” It is full of tons of minerals and nutrients, including all the essential minerals our bodies need. This is also true of Genus Gracilaria, however nutritional claims are often associated with “Irish Moss” and some of these have yet to be completely proven.

Disadvantages of Chondrus Crispus

In this case, the same thing that’s an advantage for “Irish Moss” is also a disadvantage. It’s rare, so it’s harder to find and it will limit how much you can get. Some people will buy enough during the harvest season to use year round. It’s fairly potent, so you don’t need much, but the limited harvest times can make it difficult to get your hands on.

It’s also much more expensive because of the rarity. A 1/2-pound bag can run you easily around \$50. Luckily, because of the potency, that should last you about 6 months.

Another disadvantage: the smell. “Irish Moss” definitely has a distinct smell to it that may turn some off. While Genus Gracilaria also has a smell, it’s much more mild in comparison.

Conclusion

As you decide to add sea moss into your diet, choose wisely and shop responsibly. Either form will offer tons of nutritional benefits, even if it’s pool-grown. But, look to the wild-grown strains for a full-spectrum approach to nutrition and don’t be afraid of trying some seaweed today.

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SOURCES USED:

<https://veganwithcurves.com/sea-moss-vs-irish-moss/>