

Stony Coral

Where do stony corals live?

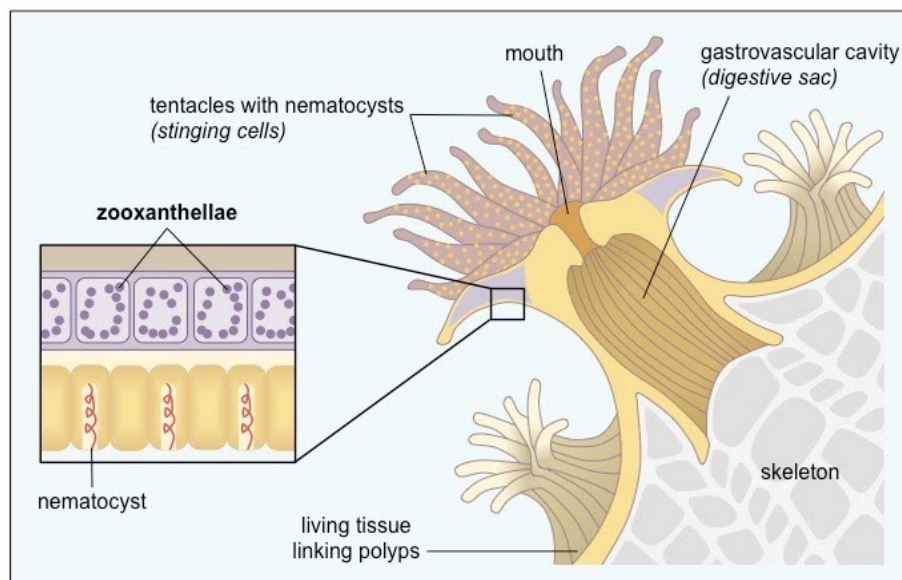
Stony corals are found in all of the world's oceans and are part of the reef building process. Coral reefs have several species of corals living together as colonies of polyps (individual corals). The polyp is made up of a soft, sac-like body and it excretes a hard exoskeleton, which builds up the reef.

What do stony corals eat?

Like other coral species, stony corals have tentacles that surround its mouth to collect plankton or even small fish. But the corals' primary food source comes from the photosynthetic algae that live inside the polyps.

What eats stony coral?

Fish, marine worms, barnacles, crabs, snails and sea stars all prey on coral polyps; more specifically the algae that lives in the polyps' cells. However, the biggest threat to coral is climate change. Coral bleaching happens when corals become stressed from warming waters and pollution, and release the algae living in their cells. Coral not only lose their energy source, but also their bright colors.

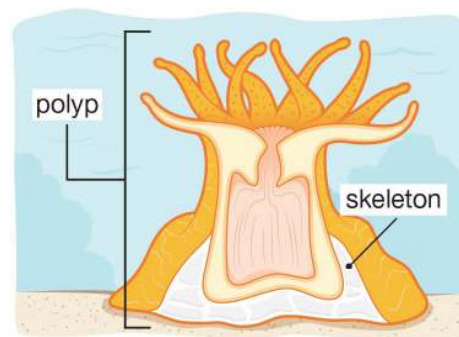


How do you think coral survives?

How does coral survive?

Exoskeleton

Stony coral polyps produce an exoskeleton made of calcium carbonate. This protects their soft bodies and gives them something to hold on to.



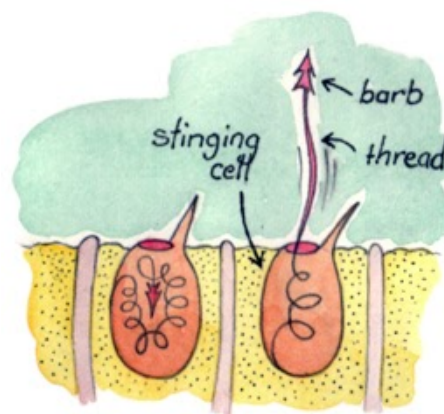
Tentacles

Coral polyps will use their tentacles to collect food and bring it to their mouth (at the center of the ring). The tentacles also contain stinging cells called cnidocytes (neye-DOH-sites).



Stinging cells

Like most cnidarians (neye-DARE-ians), coral polyps have special cells that contain nematocysts (ni-MAH-toe-sists) in their tentacles. Armed with these tiny, harpoon-like structures, they use these cells to protect themselves from predators and to catch prey at the same time.



Symbiotic Relationship

Inside the cells of coral polyps lives an algae called zooxanthellae (zo-o-ZAN-thell-ee). The algae receives shelter and CO_2 from the coral to use for photosynthesis, and the corals receive the nutrients that are made through photosynthesis. The mutually beneficial relationship between the coral and the algae is called symbiosis.

