



Photo Courtesy Volusia County Artificial Reef Dive Research Team

Green Sea Urchin or Decorator Urchin *Lytechinus variegatus*

Range: Warm waters of the Western Atlantic, from North Carolina and Bermuda southward to the Caribbean and Brazil. *L. variegatus* is most commonly found in calm, clear waters, usually no deeper than 164 ft (50m), near seagrass beds or on rock or sand.

Similar Species: The Sea Egg, *Tripneustes ventricosus*, is similar with short spines covering the sea urchin's shell or test. The two can be distinguished by comparing the color of the flesh around the mouth on the bottom of the urchin. The mouth of the Sea Egg is surrounded by a brown flesh.

Identification: Despite their name, Green Sea Urchins are usually more white or pink in appearance. They are distinguished from other sea urchins by having relatively short spines. They can reach a diameter of around 4 inches (110mm). This species has white or pink globiferous pedicellariae which are tiny appendages located between the spines of the urchin. They use these pedicellariae to remove unwanted parasites and debris from the spines and test of the urchin. Globiferous pedicellariae differ from other pedicellariae by having toothed blades and poison sacs to capture and paralyze prey.

Note: The Green Sea Urchin will sometimes cover its body with various shells, plants and other materials to, according to popular theory, protect itself from damaging intense light and UV radiation. The covering behavior may also protect the urchin from predators.