

## Hawaiian Feather Duster

### Information on the Hawaiian feather duster (*Sabellastarte* sp.)

*Text and photo by Clay Jackson*

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Hawaiian Feather Duster If you have ever been fortunate enough to experience the mesmerizing effects of watching a feather duster retract with lightening quickness into its protective tube, you know what all the hubbub is about when it comes to these intriguing marine invertebrates. Inexpensive, colorful, hardy and peaceful toward virtually all other reef tank inhabitants, these forgiving fan worms are perfect for first-time reefkeepers but still able to start conversations among old-timers.

#### Physical Description

The umbrellalike crown, consisting of roughly 30 feathery radioles, or gills, of the Hawaiian feather duster can reach 7 or 8 inches in diameter, when extended fully outward. The individual feathers are tan, white, orange, brown, purple and other colors, with alternating brown bands. By waving its radioles, the feather duster creates its own gentle water movement that guides minute bits of plankton from the water column onto sticky tentacles and into its mouth, which is located in the center of the crown. The radioles of these unusual, segmented marine worms not only capture and provide food, but they aid in breathing too. Feather dusters secrete mucous that bits of substrate adhere to and that produces a cocoonlike structure, described as being similar in look and feel to heavy paper or leather.

#### Range

Hawaii

#### Compatibility

These fascinating marine invertebrates get along with all reef tank animals.

#### Hardiness

Hardy and forgiving

#### Level of Expertise

All levels

#### Aquarium Conditions

Water temperatures of 72 to 84 degrees Fahrenheit; pH 8.0 to 8.4; water flow medium; dKH 8 to 12; specific gravity 1.023 to 1.025.

#### Care Considerations

Copper-based medications used to treat fishes for diseases can quickly dispatched feather dusters. Poor water quality can also adversely affect these animals. Medium water flow is critical as feather dusters rely on it for breathing, excretion (removing waste products away from them) and the distribution of planktonic foods throughout the water column. Feather dusters should only be introduced into well-established aquariums rife with planktonic foods, but even with that they require supplemental feedings of phytoplankton, liquid organic foods and any organic detritus settled in the substrate.

Nannochloropsis, Tetraselmis and Isochrysis algae make excellent foods for feather dusters. When feeding them, turn off protein skimmers for about one hour to make sure food targeted for them stays put. Likewise, intermittent stirring of the sandbed helps to suspend settled detritus back up into the water column where the worms can access it. While feather dusters are totally reef compatible, they may fall prey to aggressive fishes (e.g., dwarf angelfishes, some sea stars, etc.). They do best with peaceful fishes and invertebrates. Sandy, rubbly substrate assists feather dusters in building their tubes, while rockwork is important for them to affix themselves to.

#### Special Note

Feather dusters may drop their crowns if stressed. This is no cause for alarm as the crown will regenerate in time, although the source of the stress should be found and removed.