

GUIDE TO MARINE INVADERS IN THE GULF OF MAINE

Botrylloides violaceus

orange or red sheath tunicate



Andrew Martinez

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

- Dense clusters of individual animals (zooids) sometimes forming extensive colonies
- Zooids (0.1in) arranged in loose circles, rows, or dense colonies
- Forms firm gelatinous covering; sometimes forms lobes
- Color variable: typically bright orange, red, or dull purple



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HABITAT PREFERENCE

- Found primarily in the subtidal zone; occasionally in protected areas within the intertidal zone
- Attaches to submerged structures, algae, slow moving organisms

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INVASION STATUS & ECOLOGICAL CONCERNS

This tunicate is found throughout the entire coastline of the eastern United States. *Botrylloides violaceus* was probably introduced to the United States from its native home in the Northwest Pacific via ship fouling. Since its arrival in the 1970s, it has spread from Maine to Florida. It was also introduced to the British Isles, Norway, and the Mediterranean, Adriatic, and Black Seas. Like other colonial tunicates, it may grow over other organisms, possibly leading to the organism's death.

SIMILAR SPECIES

At first glance, this colonial tunicate may look much like other encrusting marine animals, such as sponges. However, when examined under a microscope, you will see that they have the same structures as solitary tunicates (see diagram on right).

B. violaceus may look similar to orange or red sponges and other colonial tunicates such as *Didemnum vexillum* and *Botryllus schlosseri*. However, the texture of *B. violaceus* is more rigid than that of a sponge, and the zooids are arranged in a chain-like pattern, distinguishing it from other colonial tunicate species.

Anatomy
of an
individual
tunicate

