

SE Epicure  
HD **Surprising superfood of the sea**  
BY sophie o'neil  
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trends

Invasive seaweed believed to have been accidentally introduced by visiting ships is nutritious and delicious.

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On a chilly late-winter morning Portarlington mussel farmer Mike Houghton took his first **commercial** haul of fresh wakame to a Melbourne city farmers' market. He wasn't sure what the response would be to the sea vegetable, which grows wild on his mussel ropes, but within a couple of hours he'd **sold** more than 20 kilograms.

Most people know wakame as the leafy green in miso soup. We mainly eat the dried Japanese, Korean or **Chinese** product, yet the seaweed grows abundantly in coastal waters off Tasmania and Victoria.

Marine biologist Craig Sanderson was the first to identify wakame or undaria pinnatifida in Tasmania in 1988. "We believe it was originally introduced in ballast waters of visiting ships," he says.

Despite being an invasive weed, wakame and the plant's flowering sprout, mekabu, are highly nutritious. Since 2003 Australian biotechnology **company** Marinova has harvested Tasmanian wakame for its fucoidan content, complex sugar molecules believed to contribute to the exceptionally high number of people on the Japanese **island** of Okinawa living beyond 100 years. Wakame is also a good source of minerals, iodine and vitamins B1, B2, B6, niacin and betacarotene. Since being spotted in Tasmania 26 years ago, wakame now grows along Tasmania's east coast from Dover to St Helens, as well as around Port Phillip and Apollo Bay in Victoria.

Sanderson has gone into partnership with seafood marketer James Ashmore to commercially harvest the seaweed, selling it dried and frozen under the Ocean Treasure label.

Houghton's **company** Shellfish Direct sells fresh wakame to restaurants and through farmers' markets while developing a dehydrated product.

"It looks daunting, but fresh wakame is really easy to cook," he says. "Just plunge it in hot water and watch it turn vibrant green. Then pop it cold water to stop the cooking process and it's ready to add to soups, salads, pasta or even an omelette."

At Irish bar and restaurant the Last Jar in Melbourne's CBD, chef Tim Sweeney likens fresh wakame to sleabhac, seaweed found on the Irish coast.

"The wakame imparts a subtle sea flavour. We wrap it around barramundi and it cooks like en papillote."

Chef Adrian Li, who has been working on a dish for Tokyo Tina, due to open in Windsor in late October, says wakame's texture reminds him of soba noodles. He combines soba noodles and seaweed with wood ear fungus and a spicy ginger and soy dressing. "Fresh wakame might be more perishable than dried, but it has a totally different taste to imported products."

At Sydney's Rockpool, head chef Phil Wood is also a big fan of fresh wakame, featuring the Tasmanian product recently in a dish of abalone noodles with master stock-cooked goose and chicken skin. He believes it could become a major part of our diet. "It's full of vitamins and minerals and tastes delicious."

[oceantreasure.com.au](http://oceantreasure.com.au)

[shellfishdirect.com.au](http://shellfishdirect.com.au)

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