**SEA VEGETABLES**

by Michael Halm

Although not now well known by most Americans, in the Orient and Hawaii the algae are considered a sea vegetable, as common and respected as the cabbage is in our diets. In Europe the red algae, Irish moss and dulse are widely used as food and were more so in the colonial days of our own country.

The cultivation of this crop began in Japan in 1730 and in Massachusetts in 1835. Since then it has grown into a large industry. In Japan they account for ten percent of the total food intake.

Americans are more dependent on them than they realize. Brown algae, or kelp, is used in meal for livestock, as a source of alginic acid used in dairy products, salad dressings and pie fillings. Red algae is used in the preparation of cough medicine and the brewing industry. The red algae has an interesting animal-like life cycle, including a complex sex life with both eggs and sperm.

*Kimbu*, the Japanese ''seaweed'' that comes in hard black sheets, is high in iodine and other minerals and vitamin C. It is used as a seasoning for root vegetables with rice and sometimes woven into baskets and deep fried. It is considered a symbol of festivity because its name sounds like the word for happiness.

Another common one is *nori*, rich in vitamins A, B-12 and D and also in minerals. Some other terms that might be of interest are *dashi*, the widely used fish broth stock. *Ichibi dashi* is made by simmering *kombu* and *katsuobushi*, dried *bonito*, for two minutes (two cups of *katsuobushi* to two and a half cups of water). *Naban dashi*, which is used with vegetables, is usually made from the left-over katsuobushi strained from the *ichiban dashi* (one cup of *katsuobushi* to five cups of water).

From *nori* is made sushi, a vinegared rice using sweet sake or sherry (or as a substitute, apple juice). *Onigiri* is rice wrapped in *nori* and sliced into "rounds". Sometimes *nori* is just used as a garnish with rice topped with a whipped egg. *Wakame* and *hijiki* are also used in soups and salads. *Azuki* is used to add red color, a symbol of joy, to rice.

In the Atlantic there is carrageen or Irish moss, used primarily in making blancmange. It can be molded into attractive shapes and topped with strawberries. To make it the Irish moss is soaked, cleaned, drained and stirred into milk (one and a half pints milk per cup). The milk is scalded in a double boiler and has two tablespoons of sugar added. Stir until the mixture thickens. Strain the mixture through a sieve to give a thin custard. Flavor with vanilla or lemon and let firm overnight.

Dulse is another red algae much used in Europe as food. In fact, in the Scottish Highlands it is said, "A dish of dulse boiled in milk is the best of all vegetables." The Irish and American Indians also ate dulse with fish dishes.

Long before either goiter or the effects of iodine were understood, dulse was known to cure the problem. Some people now, concerned with both sodium and iodine in their diets, use it as a salt substitute.

Iodine is a regulator of the thyroid gland and protects the brain from certain body toxins. Magnesium, also found in the sea vegetables, is said to help the nervous system, promote sleep, and be good for the complexion. Other minerals are manganese, also found in many land vegetables, "the fertility mineral", the ''de-toxifier'' chlorine and sulfur.