



Me and my Marimos

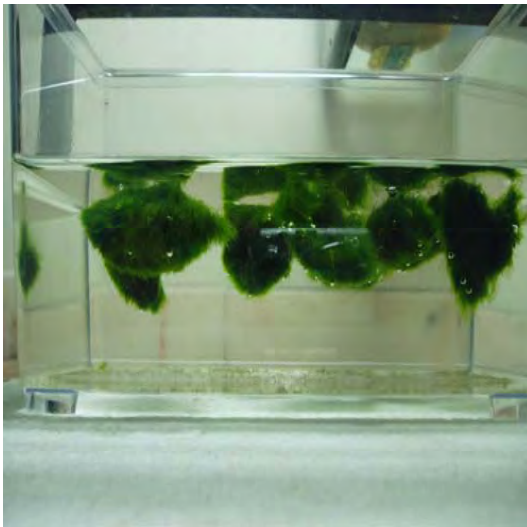
Green Culture Singapore Feature Article for June 2007

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Marimo Moss Ball is actually a type of algae scientifically called *Aegagropila linnaei* in 1843, which was subsequently renamed as *Cladophora aegagropila* in 1849. In 2002, it was returned to its original name of *Aegagropila linnaei* after extensive DNA research that proved it's not a true *Cladophora* species.

In Japan, these little fellows are only to be found at Lake Akan, Hokkaido and were declared National Treasures by the Japanese. A huge publicity exercise immortalised them as Marimo Moss balls although the algae can also be found in Europe, USA and Russia so don't get too worried that you are getting a "fake" Marimo Moss ball if you buy yours from these countries.



It is a bit difficult for me to explain why I love these little balls of algae so much. Perhaps it is the gentle spherical huggable form they have or the lush green they wear (at times with pearls of airbubbles as accessories).

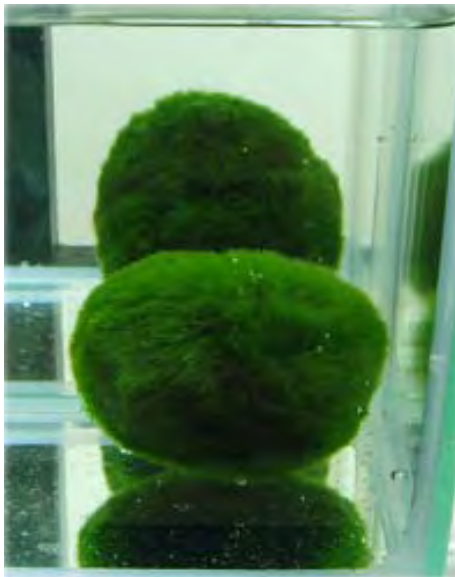
Left: Marimo balls with airbubbles.

I had placed a large order for Marimos from Europe and while waiting for their arrival, I read up on their growing conditions, places of origin, basically whatever I could find on Marimo Balls. There wasn't a whole lot of write-up on the Web but enough to give a general idea on the dos and don'ts.

Given the right conditions, the big Marimo balls will grow very big and may have to be split into smaller Marimos. I've read about an aquarium owner who used a Marimo to control the algae problem in his tank. The Marimo grew to the size of a grapefruit.

After some time, you might notice that your big Marimo is slowly producing lump. That is a baby Marimo. It can be slowly worked out of the mummy Marimo. This might leave a big hole in the mummy Marimo. If you don't want to wait for new Marimos to be produced this way, you can split the mummy Marimo into little balls like I did and wait for them to grow into cute little green spheres looking just like mummy.

Below are a couple of pictures of Marimos kept by a couple of GCS members – Albertat84 and KookyPlum. Aren't they beautiful?



Marimo balls belong to Albert (**left**) and Hakim (**below**).



Sharing my Experience

I prepared a big tank where Malayan shrimps were placed to provide some nutrients in the form of their waste products and to clean up the Marimos. Good companion fishes would be the guppy and bettas as they don't eat the moss.

There is a filter pump that provides a constant and firm current of water pushing against the Marimos. The current is not so strong that the shrimps are swirled every which way but strong enough to provide some sort of resistance or pressure needed to encourage growth.

Here are some pictures of my little darlings:



Left: Relaxing in the tank after their long journey on 23 February 2007.

Right: There were some big ones as well:



Left: Tuffy arrived a little worse for wear but is a whole lot better now.

After some time, the balls will collect debris (they are sometime called debris magnets). You clean them by wringing them out gently like a sponge in clean water and dump them back to their tanks.

When they first arrived, the bottom of my sink was covered with sand after I finished gently wringing them out. Here, they are on my bathroom countertop after their bath:

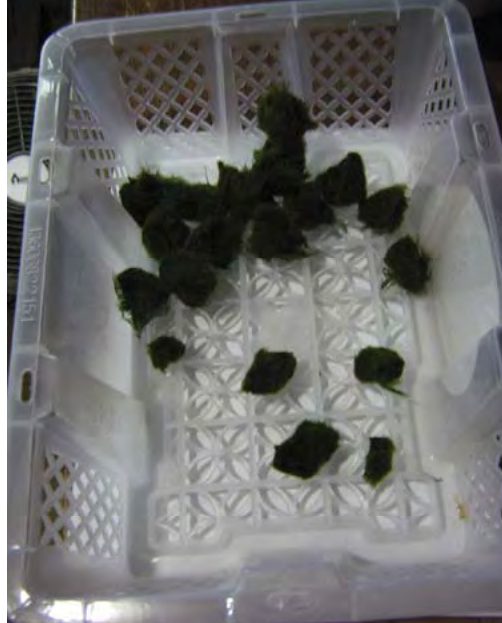


An Experiment

I split a slightly smashed big 2.75 inch Marimo into 16 pieces. I had originally planned to split it into 8 or 10 but as I continued to split them into thumb-sized bits, I ended up with 16 pieces. The interior was slightly “gunky”.



These were placed into a white plastic fruit basket together with 4 other balls too irregular in shape to be a normal ball. The basket lid was tied on and placed in a huge fish tank which has been converted into a water storage tank in Punggol Coral Community Garden.



The Marimo bits stayed in the water storage tank for about 2 months. The green water problem we had in the water tank was not much of a problem during this time.

After 2 months (25 April 2007), I decided to take them back home as they didn't look as though they grew and were not looking very well - they turned from a nice dark green to olive green. The water in the water storage tank proved too warm for them and they had too much bright light. Upon closer inspection, I discovered that their texture had become courser and denser than when I first split them up.

The bits spent 5 weeks in their own tank in a cooler environment (when I put my hand in the tank, it feels cool) and have slowly resumed their dark green colouring. They had also started to take on a more spherical shape. It is not a huge change in shape but you know that they are rounding off in shape.

It'll be a while before they will look like the mummy Marimo. Stay tuned for a further update in December 2007.

Acknowledgements

Green Culture Singapore would like to thank Lynnette for her time to write this feature article to share their experience on the growing of Marimo balls. She would also like to extend her gratitude to two members of the Green Culture Singapore discussion forum, namely, Albert (albertat84) and Hakim (KookyPlum), for sharing with the reader the pictures of their Marimo balls.

About the Contributor

Lynnette Terh is currently member and moderator at the Green Culture Singapore discussion forum. She started gardening seriously five years ago and is into ornamental plants, foliage plants and western herbs although she's eclectic in her choice of plants in pursuit of gardening knowledge. Lynnette is also in-charge of the Punggol Coral Community Garden at Edgedale Plains, Punggol. She advocates the use of organic materials as far as possible. Her membership in Green Culture Singapore has greatly sharpened her gardening acumen and confidence and firmly believes that you can have a garden anywhere as long as you have the know-how and perseverance.

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