About Crinoids

Crinoids are commonly known as sea lilies, though they are animals, not plants. Crinoids are echinoderms related to starfish, sea urchins, and brittle stars. Many crinoid traits are like other members of their phylum. Such traits include tube feet, radial symmetry, a water vascular system, and appendages in multiples of five (pentameral).

Most of the Paleozoic crinoid species attached themselves to substrates on the ocean floor. Crinoids are famous for their feathery, tentacle-like appendages that opened up like a flower and captured particles of food such as plankton. Though crinoids appeared in the Ordovician (488 mya), they survived the Permian mass extinction and diversified into hundreds of species which survive, today.

Crinoid Quick Facts:

Crinoids have pentaradial, or five-fold symmetry.

Crinoidea is derived from “krinon”, which is Greek for “a lily.”

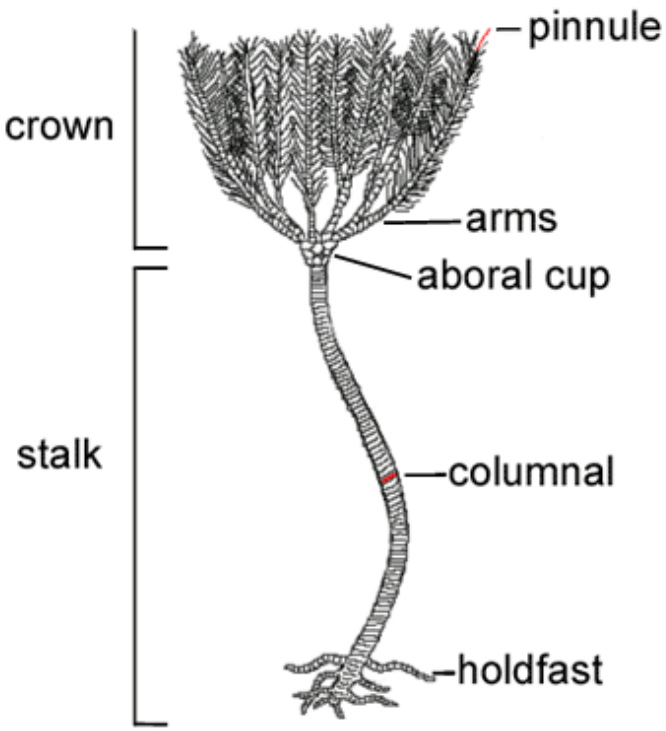
Crinoids capture food with tube feet when prey and detritus float through its feathery arms.

The largest fossil crinoid stem which has ever been found is 130 ft (40 m) long.

Crinoids once carpeted the ocean floor, swaying with the currents.

Crinoids are some of the Earth’s earliest animals. They have managed to survive and evolve through several global climate changes and mass extinctions.

Fossilized segments from the stalks have been used as beads for necklaces and rosaries.



< Fossil of a typical crinoid

Modern day stalked crinoid in the Gulf of Mexico >

A fossilized holdfast of the crinoid Eucalyptocrinites which would have anchored it to the substrate. >

Crinoid coloring sheet