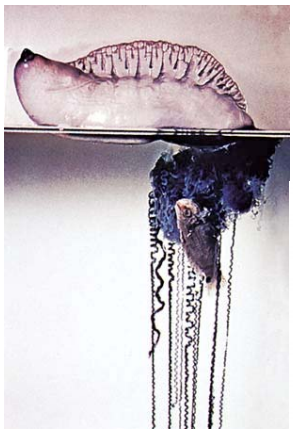
Portuguese Man-of-War

Classification

K: Animalia
P: Cnidaria
C: Hydrozoa
O: Siphonophora
F: Physaliidae
G: *Physalia*
S: *Physalis*

Picture



Notice entangled prey

Size comparison

Physical characteristics

A Portuguese man-of-war is a "siphonophore," an animal made up of a colony of organisms working together. It is comprised of 4 highly-specialized polyps dependent on one another:

1. A purplish-blue gas-filled bladder, or "pneumatophore," that resembles an old warship – for transport
2. Muscular tentacles, or "dactylozooids" that may extend 165 feet and are covered with venomous nematocysts – for prey capture and defense
3. Digestive organisms, or "gastrozooids"
4. Reproductive organisms, or "gonozooids"

Habitat

Men-of-war are found at the surface of warm oceans, most commonly the tropical and subtropical regions of the Pacific and Indian oceans and northern Atlantic Gulf Stream. They usually "swarm" in groups of 1,000 or more. They rely on the wind and water currents to transport them.

Life Cycle and Reproduction

First, *Physalia* produce sexually: the sperm of one gonozooid fertilizes the egg of another's, producing a small larva (free-swimming medusa). Then, the larva asexually buds, or grows into identical offspring, forming its own colony. A rapid increase in size depends on available food (other fish), temperature (temperate like Hawaii's climate), and space (the more territory the better). Lifespan: 3-5 months.

Interesting Facts

Portuguese men-of-war:

1. Can deflate their pneumatophores and drift just under the water's surface during storms and other threats.
2. Technically aren't jellyfish, but hydrozoan colonies.
3. Have a symbiotic relationship with small fish, *Nomeus gronovii*, that are immune to the tentacles' venom; these fish live among the tentacles and eat the "dead ends" that are constantly regenerated. In exchange for the food and protection, the fish attract prey for the colony.
4. Have painful but rarely deadly stings for humans.