

ORA Grown FARM-HARDY SPS

by Vanessa Sommers with images by Oceans, Reefs & Aquariums

Thriving colonies of the famous “Stuber Acropora” growing at Oceans, Reefs & Aquariums in Fort Pierce, Florida. Descended from an unidentified coral that reached Berlin in the 1980s, this coral has been domesticated and spread from aquarium to aquarium around the globe for more than 30 years.

In the early days of keeping stony corals, aquarists could only enjoy an actual sliver of the ocean—colorful reef fishes and impressive live coral colonies—for a brief few days or weeks. Sadly, most corals had little chance of surviving and would ultimately fade to lifeless white. The skeletons left behind were a painful reminder that we had much to learn about how to properly care for corals.

As aquarium technology and knowledge have advanced, the chances of success for beginning aquarists have greatly improved. The success of today’s hobbyists can be attributed to advances in lighting, filtration, and water motion, as well as access to a steady supply of readily available cultured corals that are both beautiful and resilient. These hardy corals are more tolerant of temperature swings, fluctuations in alkalinity, power outages, and the neighbors who watch your aquarium while you vacation hundreds of miles away.



Coral production manager Vanessa Sommers, left, and coral technician Rich Jones caring for corals in the ORA coral greenhouse. Below: Lifting a section of large ORA Mint Pavona colonies from a coral trough for inspection and propagation.



When taking the dive into the wonderful world of reefkeeping and choosing your first corals, it is important to consider which ones have the highest likelihood of thriving. If you have a basic understanding of proper marine water chemistry and have or can acquire key pieces of lighting and filtration equipment, you no longer have to start out with soft corals or “low light” large polyp stony corals; the entry-level hobbyist can confidently start keeping SPS.

Many bulletproof aquacultured SPS varieties are readily available from any good marine aquarium retail shop. Not only are these corals hardy and easy to care for, but they have been cultured in captivity, which reduces the pressure on the world’s reefs that results from wild collection. Facilities like Oceans, Reefs & Aquariums (ORA) in Fort Pierce, Florida, raise thousands of hardy

SPS corals for the hobby; some “domesticated” varieties haven’t been in the ocean for over 25 years. The following list has been compiled for *CORAL* Magazine readers by ORA staff who have decades of experience as skilled coral farmers and aquarists. In putting together the list they also drew on feedback received from thousands of aquarists and store owners over the past decades.

ABOVE (BOTH): RENEE HUNTER/ORA

ACROPORA

1. ORA Blue Voodoo

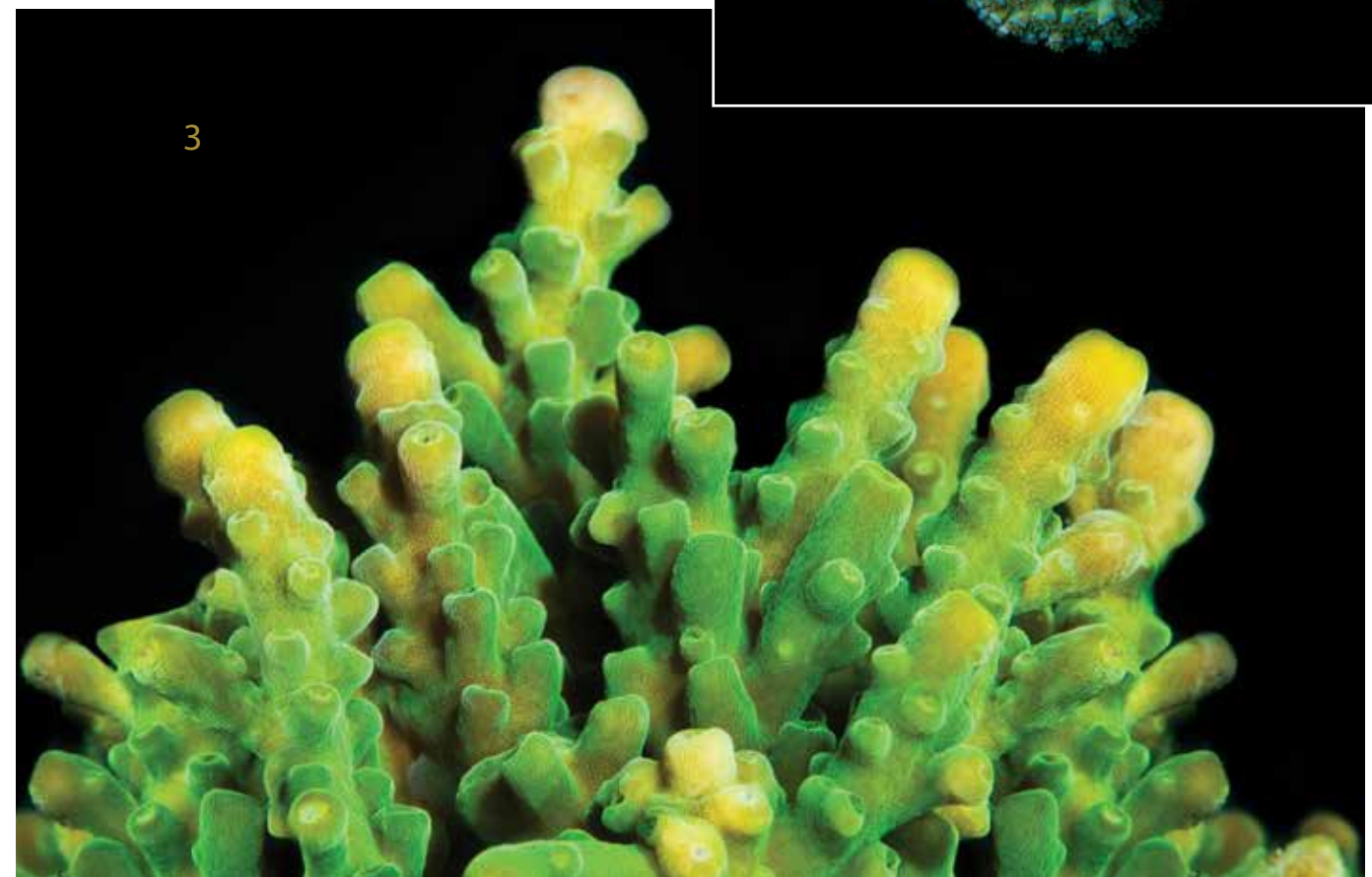
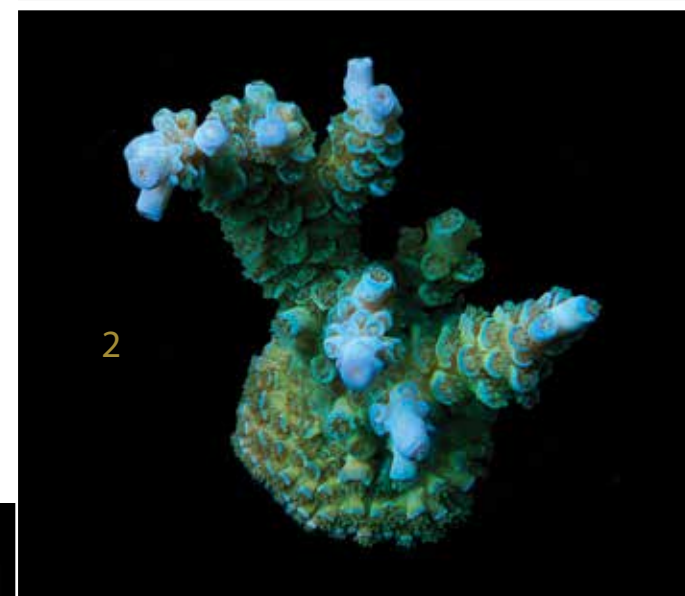
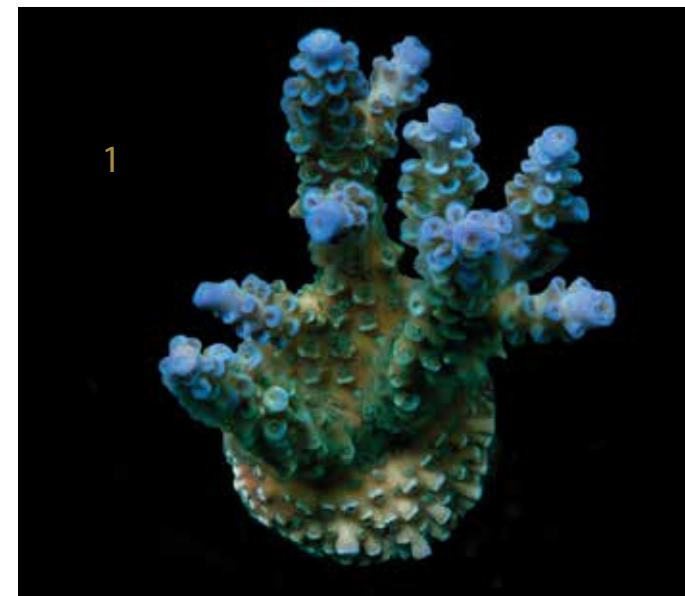
The ORA Blue Voodoo has green tissue and polyps with attractive indigo/purplish-blue tips. The colony growth form is typically long, straight, upright branches in an arborescent shape. This fast-growing, hardy *Acropora* can be kept in a wide range of aquarium conditions, but color intensity varies based on light level, with blue favoring high light. ORA Blue Voodoo is one of the more popular and readily available *Acropora* varieties available from ORA.

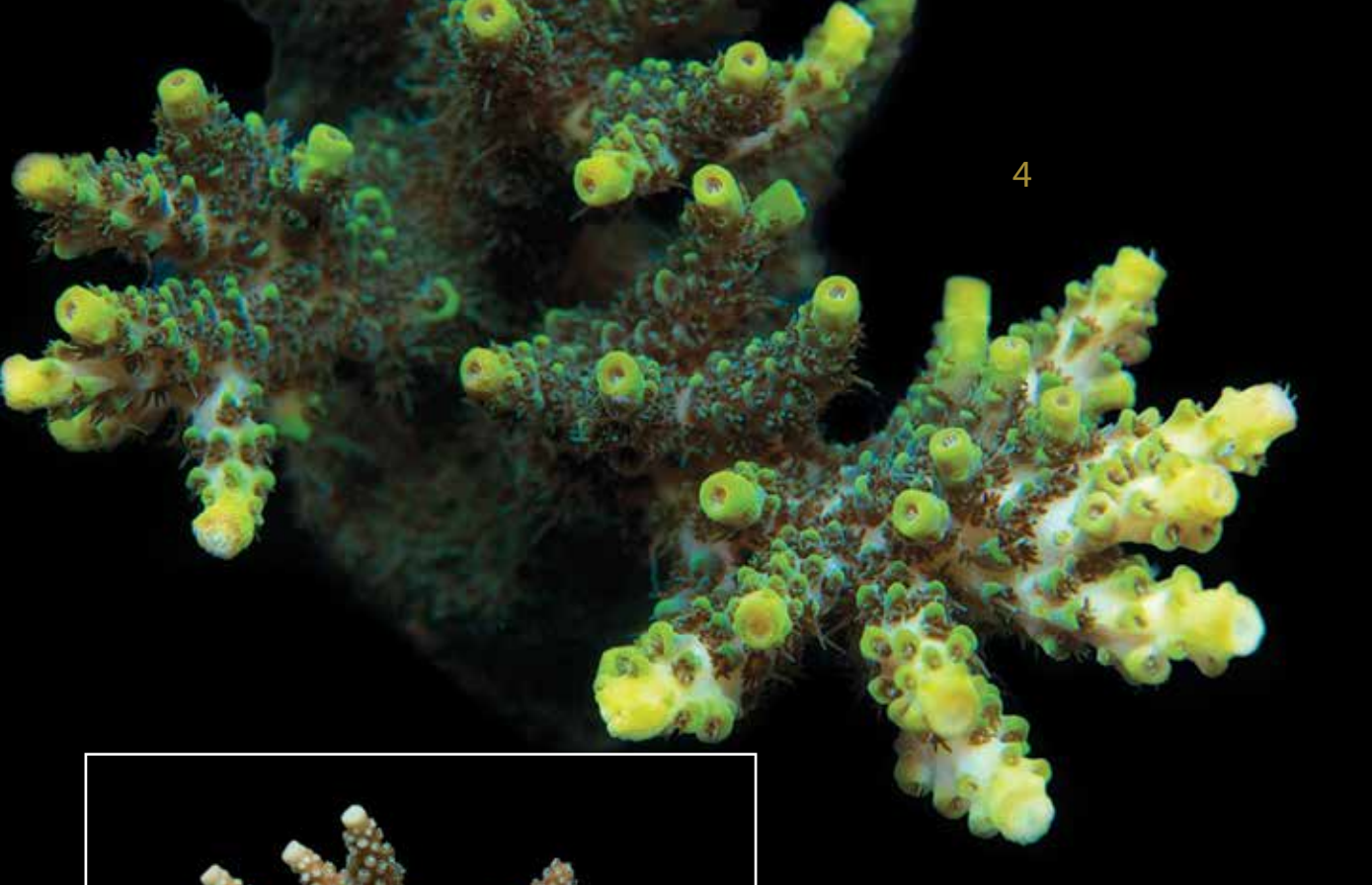
2. ORA Borealis

The ORA Borealis is a tightly clustered, bushy *Acropora* with a green background and radiant, light blue growth tips. The ORA Borealis shows outstanding polyp extension in strong current. Similar to Blue Voodoo, it differs by having shorter and tighter branches as well as a brighter green polyp and base coloration and lighter blue tips.

3. ORA Frogskin

The ORA Frogskin Acro is a stocky branched coral with an extremely bumpy appearance and colors that vary from yellowish to bright green with shades of purple, depending on lighting conditions. The distinctive corallites are rotund and tubular, and some of the polyps have a slightly blue hue. The spectacular shape of the mature colony is what makes this coral so unique. As it grows, branches fuse together, making solid plates and a solid inner core from which the branches extend.





4. ORA Green Planet

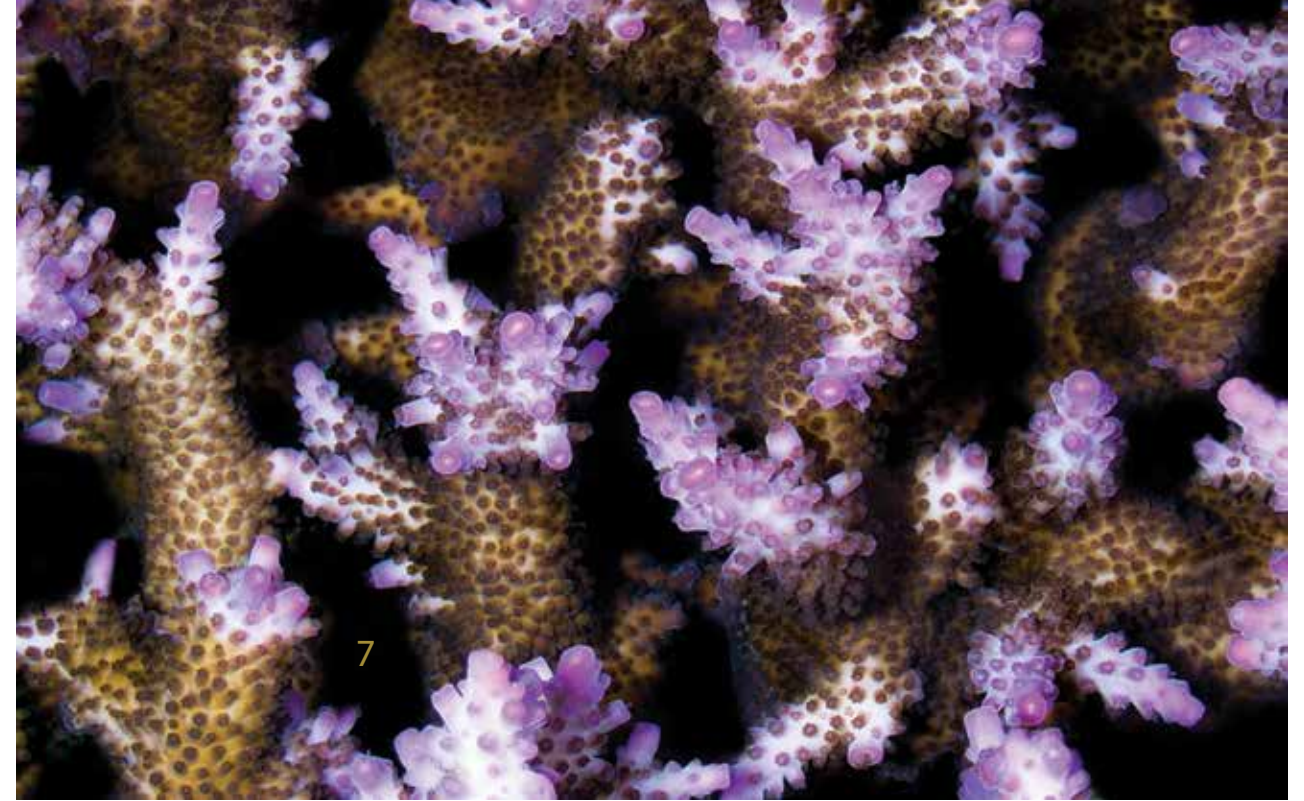
The ORA Green Planet is an intensely colored tabling *Acropora* that exhibits morphology very similar to that of the ORA Red Planet. It has fluorescent green tips with a dark green base and polyps. New growth is nearly white, adding to the contrast of this beautiful coral. Like other ORA *Acroporas*, the ORA Green Planet is hardy and fast-growing under a range of conditions, but actinic lighting really brings out the extreme fluorescent coloration of this coral.

5. ORA Green Stag

ORA Scripps Green Tip Staghorn coral has a greenish tan background with stunning bright green polyps. It can grow into an impressively large colony in short order. Typically the mature colony has many thin, long branches growing in a very treelike form. ORA has been propagating this coral, originally grown at the Birch Aquarium at Scripps, since the early 2000s.

6. ORA Indo Stag

Another of the older ORA corals popular for its ease of care and exquisite appearance, the Indo Stag is a long branching coral with a deep purple base and beautiful violet growth tips. The base of the ORA Indo Stag is thick and the branches taper to an elongated axial corallite.



7. ORA Miami Orchid

Miami Orchid is a staghorn coral with a brown and tan base and stunning magenta branch tips. This is one of the classic eye-catching ORA corals, and due to its subtle beauty it is still one of our favorites.

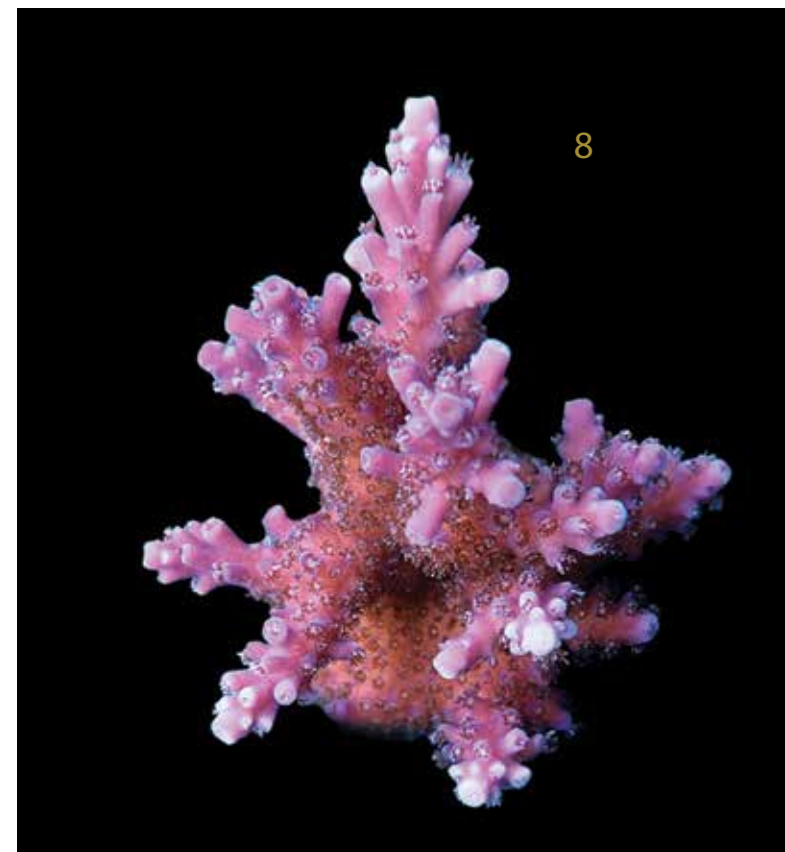
8. ORA Plum Crazy

Plum Crazy is a deep purple or plum-colored *Acropora* with relatively short branches. Colonies grow in pillow-like or corymbose form. When this coral is grown under intense lighting, new growth is a dazzling light

purple and the corallites appear to be highlighted with a light blue edge.

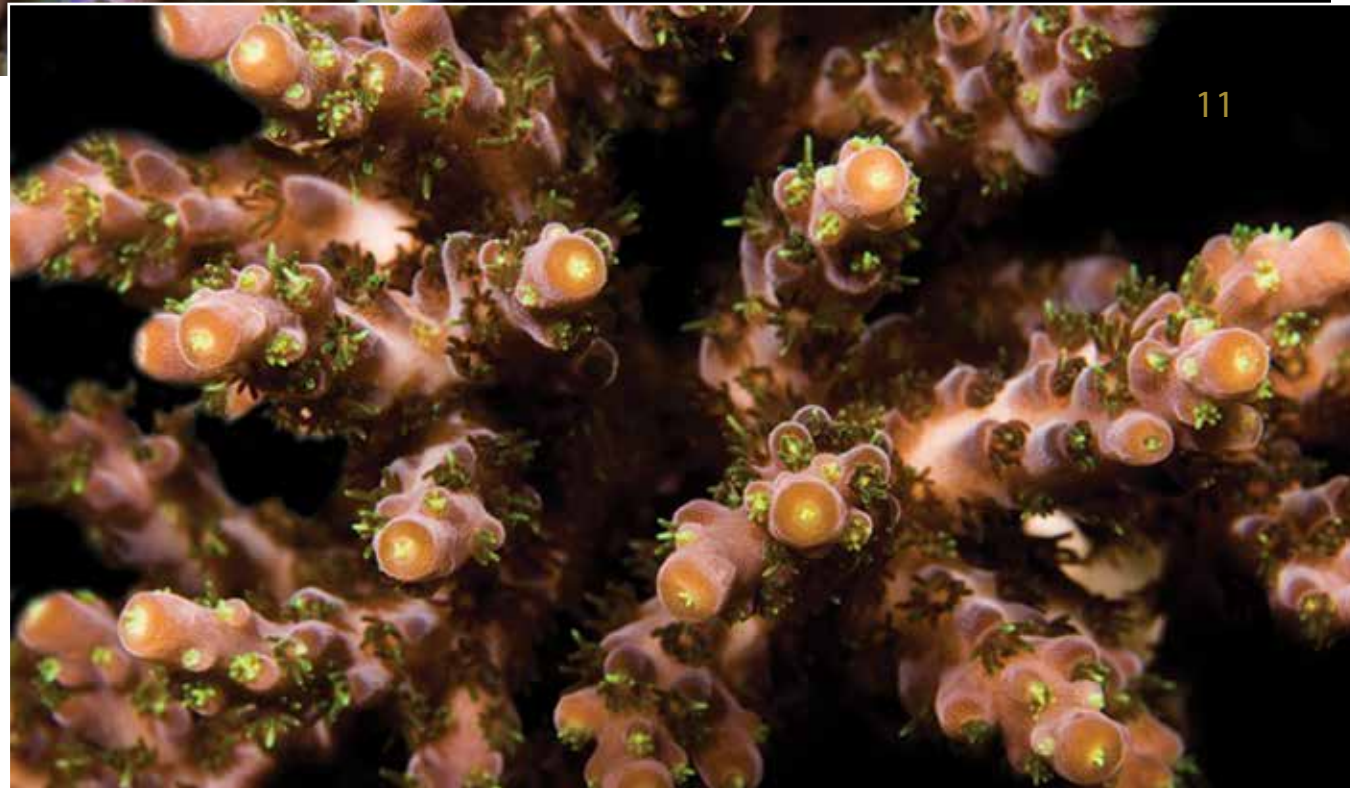
9. ORA Stuber Stag

The Stuber Stag produced at ORA is a direct descendant of the famous colony grown by Dietrich Stüber, the first SPS coral to thrive in captivity and one of the oldest ORA corals available. It is a long branching staghorn coral with a chocolate-brown base and baby blue growth tips. Stuber also has distinctive corallites that are longer and more widely spaced than those of most of our other Stags.





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10. ORA Tri-Color Valida

The ORA Tri-Color Valida is a beautiful coral that is primarily a rich purple color. As its name indicates, it also has green polyps and a brown base with green corallite highlights. *Acropora valida* is one of the most abundant coral species in the Pacific for good reason: this is one of the hardest corals and is capable of adapting to a wide range of conditions. Frags grow quickly into large, beautiful colonies.

11. ORA Verde

The ORA Verde grows in compact, bushy colonies with delicate branches. This coral's tissue is a beautiful *Sargassum* green color and its polyps are bright neon green. New growth appears pinkish when the coral is grown under intense lighting.



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MONTIPORA

12. ORA Blue Polyp Cap

The ORA Blue Polyp Capricornis is fast-growing and forms overlapping flattened plates, in lovely contrast to the stick-like growth of other stony corals. This light green *Montipora* is dotted with electric blue polyps, and heavy actinic lighting makes them glow like neon. It's best to place this beautiful coral low in the rockwork so that it won't shade any animals growing underneath its horizontal structure.



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13. ORA Green Digitata

Green Digitata is a branching neon green *Montipora* that develops vivid white growth tips. This coral is fast-growing and extremely hardy, and it's tolerant of a wide range of lighting conditions. The ORA Green Digitata is a thinner branching variety that often breaks with the slightest of touches.



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14. ORA Orange Cap

Orange Capricornis is a *Montipora* coral that forms large scrolling, leafy plates. This variety is bright orange in color and its structure is the thinnest of the ORA Caps.



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15. ORA Orange Digitata

Orange Digitata is a branching *Montipora* coral with intense orange polyps against a greenish base and white growth tips. Its growth habit is similar to that of the German Blue Polyp Digitata, but it tends to grow in a more gnarled fashion.

16. ORA Peach Digitata

Peach Digitata is a branching *Montipora* similar to Orange Digitata, but it has a luminous peach coloration on the growth tips with a solid orange base and polyp coloration. The ORA Peach Digitata has a thick-branched, more vertically oriented growth form, whereas the ORA Orange Digitata tends to grow outward and has shorter and thinner branches.

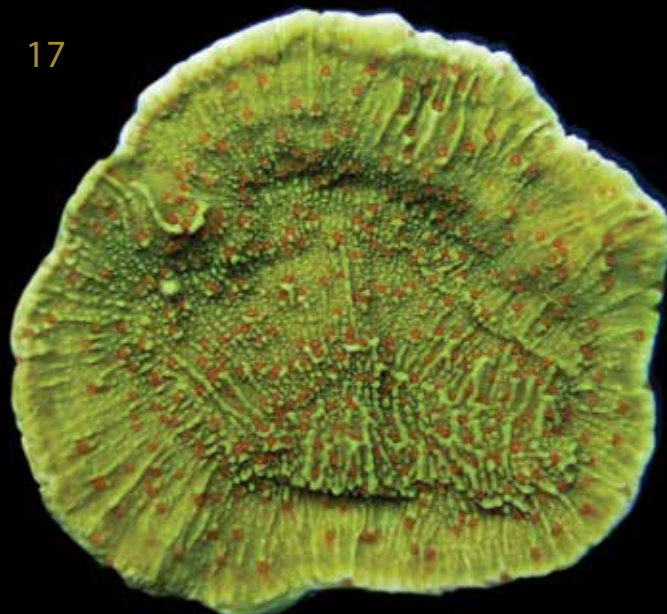
17. ORA Pink Polyp Green Cap

The ORA Pink Polyp Green Cap is a *Montipora capricornis* with an olive green base color and dark pink polyps. The contrasting polyp and tissue colors make this two-toned cap really stand out. It is a fast-growing *Capricornis* with a slightly bumpy texture and a delicate skeletal structure. As the colony matures its plating growth formation stays relatively flat, allowing for continued polyp viewing from the front glass of your tank. We find that the green tissue color looks best in medium lighting with high-Kelvin bulbs.

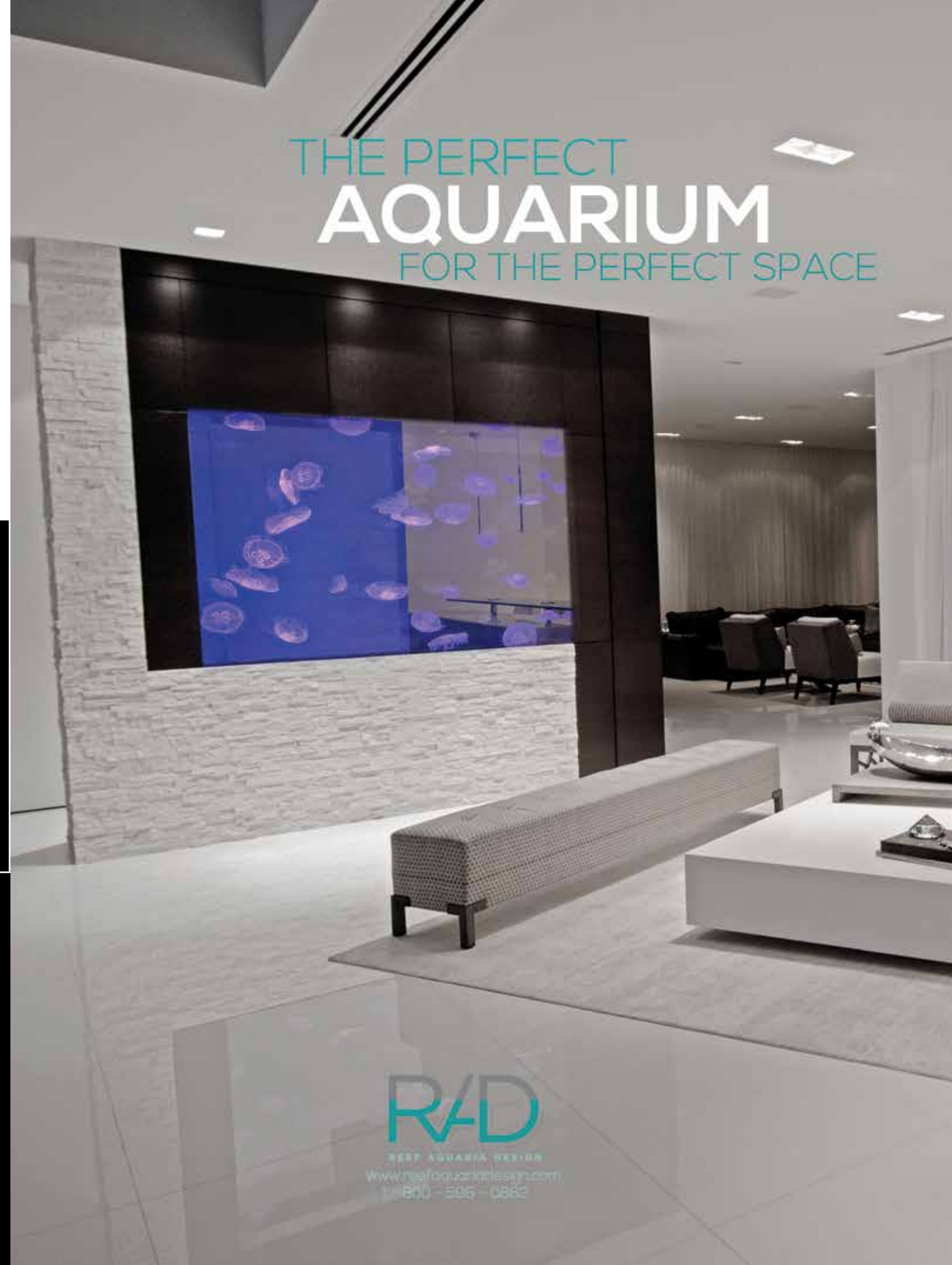
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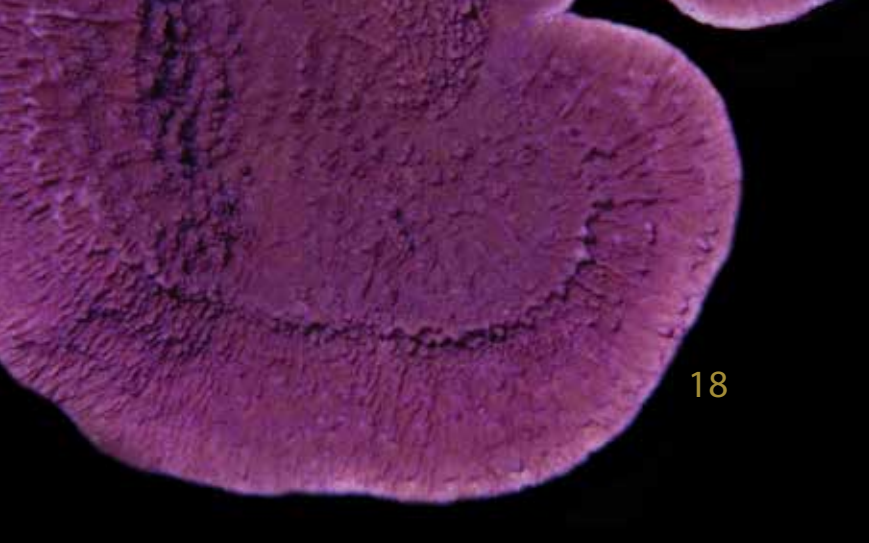


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18. ORA Purple Cap

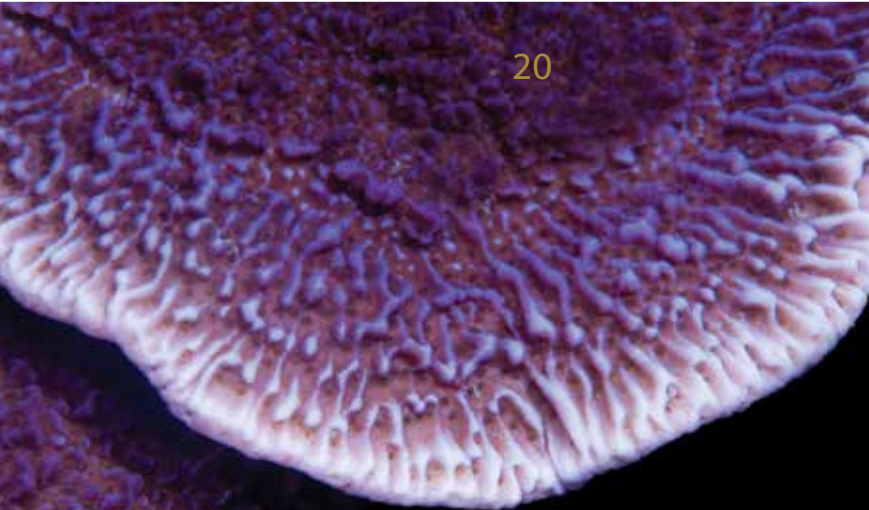
Purple Capricornis is a *Montipora* coral that forms large spiraling leafy plates. This variety is deep purple in color and has purplish blue polyps.



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19. ORA Purple Digitata

Purple Digitata is a finger-shaped *Montipora* coral with a purple background and polyps in varying shades of tan.



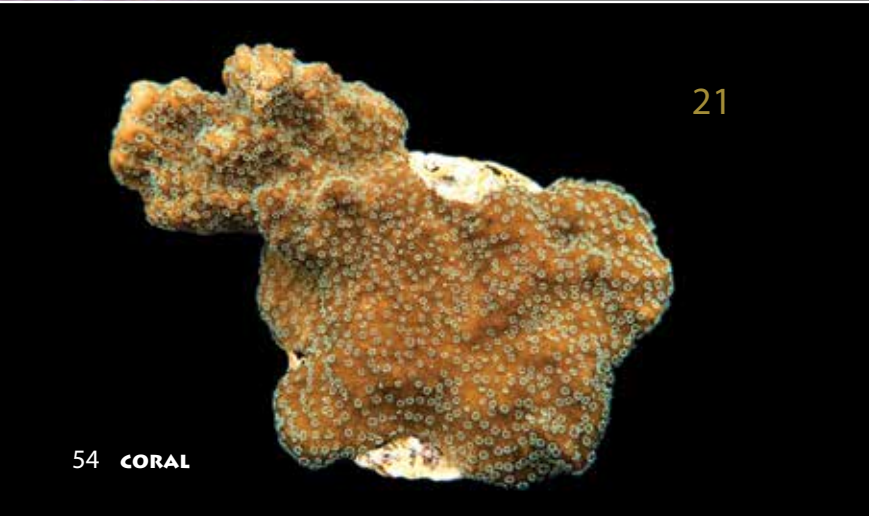
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20. ORA Purple Undata

The ORA Purple Undata is a brightly colored encrusting/plating *Montipora*. The polyps of this coral are small, purple in color, and lightly scattered between the coenosteum ridges. The Purple Undata grows into a thick, dark purple plate with a light purple edge. This is a fast-growing coral that thrives under a wide range of lighting conditions. Under intense lighting, this coral's coloration can take on a blue hue that really stands out. We have been working with this coral since 2008; our original piece came from a European hobbyist.

21. ORA Supernatural Monti

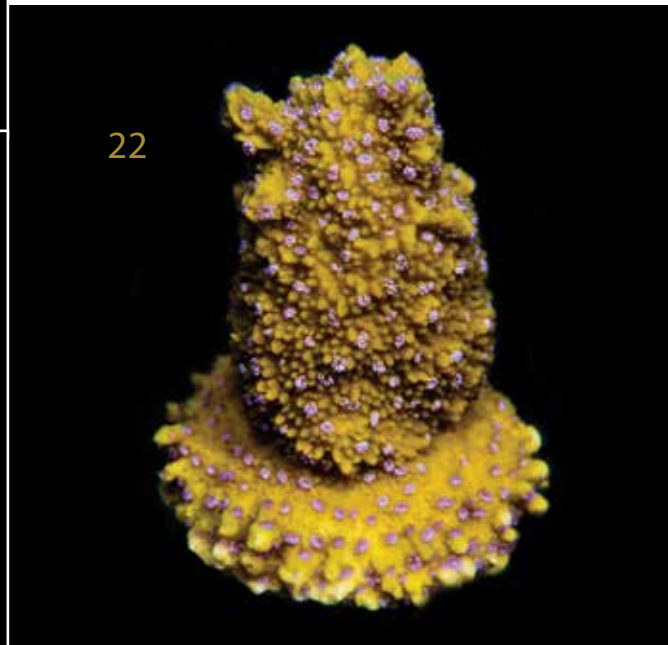
The ORA Supernatural is one of our most exceptional *Capricornis* varieties. The base is dark green in color and punctuated with neon green polyps. The Supernatural Cap grows much thicker than our other plating *Montipora* varieties.



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22. Micronesian Yellow Lantana

The Micronesian Yellow Lantana has yellowish green tissue interspersed with delicate polyps ranging in color from purple to blue.



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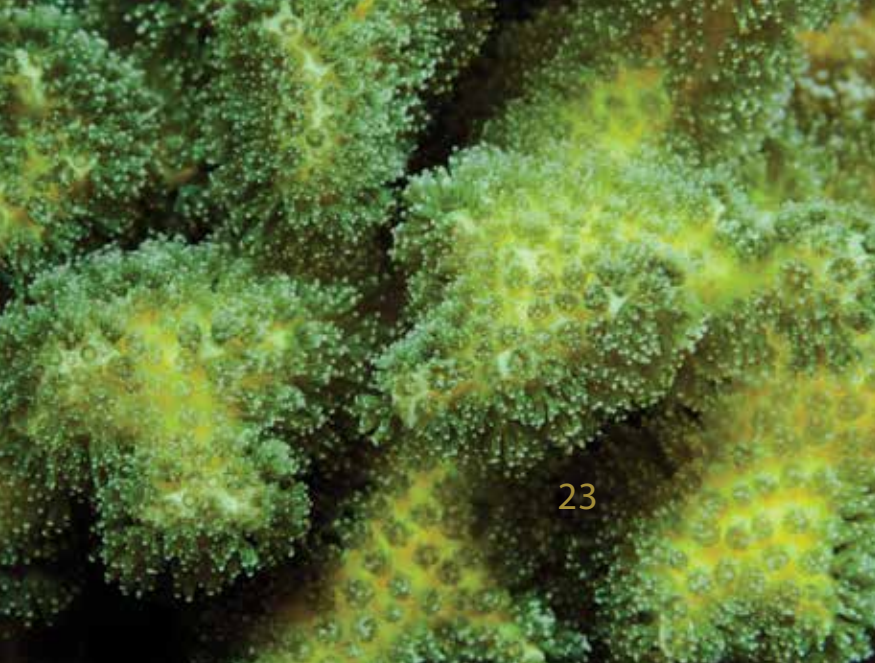
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POCILLOPORA and SERIATOPORA

23. ORA Green Damicornis

Green Damicornis is a bright yellowish green short branched coral with very fine green polyps. Extremely fast-growing, this great beginner's coral has the unique ability to reproduce in the aquarium by an asexual reproduction method commonly known as "polyp bailout."

24. ORA Green Birdsnest

The ORA Green Birdsnest is a thin branched *Seriatopora* that produces stunning green polyps on a yellow-green background. Arguably the most eye-catching birdsnest of all time, this coral glows especially brightly under high-Kelvin bulbs.



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25. ORA Pink & Green Damicornis

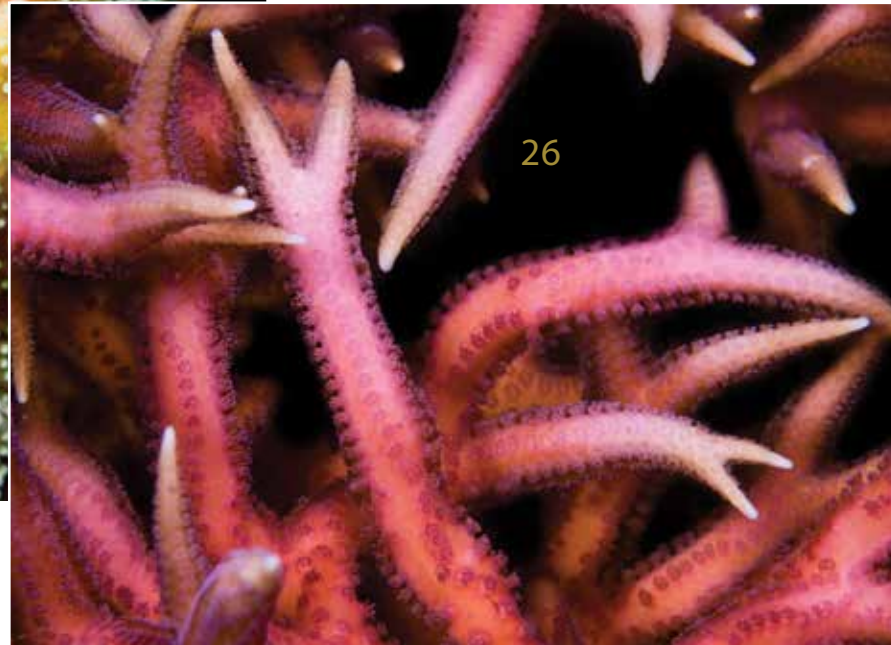
Pink & Green Damicornis is a thin branching *Pocillopora* with long green polyps and pink branch tips. The ORA variety is extremely hardy and will thrive in a wide range of lighting and flow conditions. This coral is capable of reproducing asexually and can release individual polyps that will settle out and form new colonies throughout your aquarium.

26. ORA Pink Birdsnest

The ORA Pink Birdsnest is a thin branching *Seriatopora* with luminous pink branches and polyps. Lower branches of Pink Birdsnest colonies tend to grow out, then curve downward, something we only see with this *Seriatopora* variety, giving large colonies a "weeping willow" appearance.



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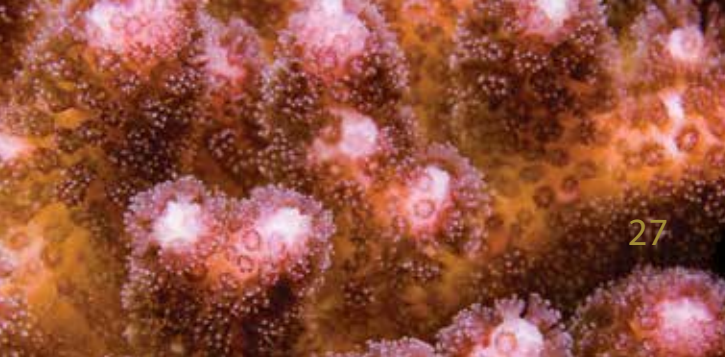
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27. ORA Pink Damicornis

Pink Damicornis has short, delicate branches and grows mostly in a compact, round shape. Colonies have an elegant pink coloration and stay smaller in size than either the Pink & Green or the Green Damicornis.

OTHER GENERA

28. ORA Green Stylophora

Green Stylophora, or Cat's Paw coral, has thick, compact, short branches with brilliant green to teal-blue polyps. It is somewhat similar in appearance to the Green Birdsnest but has a much thicker structure, with very rounded branch tips and an overall plump form. The skeleton of the ORA Green Stylo is very dense, making it very difficult to fragment. It has been suggested that this coral has been in the aquarium hobby for longer than the Stuber Staghorn.



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29. Micronesian Yellow Porites

This branching form of *Porites* has a sunny yellow color and an attractive velvety appearance when its polyps are extended. One of the corals farmed at our Clam Farm in the Pacific, this iconic SPS coral is a timeless and classic variety that is found throughout the world's reefs.



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30. ORA Kelly Green Psammocora

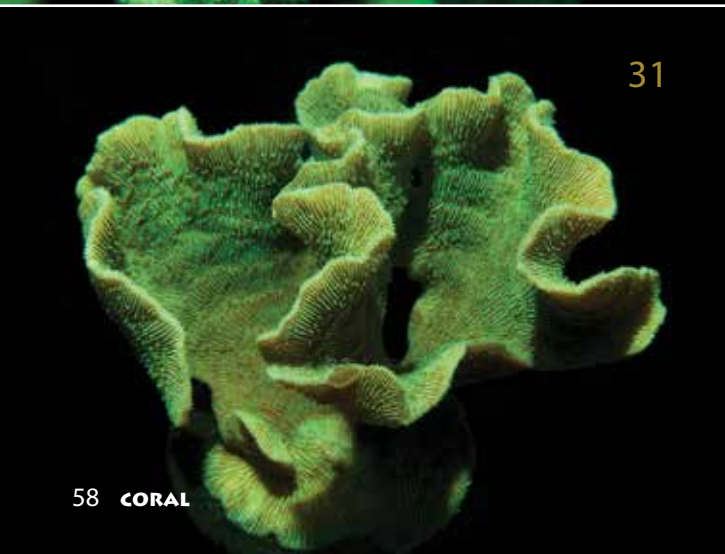
This is an intense green branching coral from the *Psammocora* genus. It is sometimes referred to as a sandpaper coral because of the fine, grainy appearance it has when its polyps are not extended. When they are fully extended, Kelly Green Psammocora has a rich, velvety look. One of the brightest green SPS corals, it really grabs your attention. It has a growth form rather unique among SPS corals: it heavily encrusts the surface it is growing on before it begins to form thick, irregular branches that spread across its surface. It grows well in a wide variety of lighting conditions, but looks best when viewed under lights heavy on the blue spectrum. Moderate to strong flow is suggested to keep detritus from accumulating on its irregular surface. We got this coral 8 to 10 years ago from one of our first employees, Kelly Hunter, who tells us that it was imported from Palau in 1994.



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31. ORA Mint Pavona

The ORA Mint Pavona (*Pavona frondifera*) is a thin, leafy species of *Pavona*. Unlike its larger and more common relative *P. cactus*, Mint Pavona has a delicate growth form and grows in a very compact colony. ORA obtained this hardy and fast-growing strain of *P. frondifera* from Julian Sprung several years ago. Though this picture was taken under natural sunlight (~5500 K), the stunning mint-green coloration is best enjoyed under lights that favor the blue end of the spectrum.



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