

WHAT ARE PLANKTON?

A quick guide to plankton



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Plankton are small organisms that live in water. They are grouped into three general categories: phytoplankton, zooplankton and microbes. Plankton are an important food source for fish in the Detroit River such as Yellow Perch, Brown Bullhead, and White Crappie.



PHYTOPLANKTON

Consist of microscopic plants that come in many forms. They make energy from sunlight, similar to land-based plants. An example of a well known type of phytoplankton are diatoms.



ZOOPLANKTON

range in size from microscopic organisms such as water fleas (*Daphnia* sp.) down to smaller organisms like mussel larvae (called veligers). Zooplankton feed on phytoplankton and smaller zooplankton.



MICROBES

include the smallest single celled organisms including bacteria and protozoans. Certain bacteria can be a problem in aquatic systems (e.g., *E. coli*), resulting in beach closures, but most are a natural part of the ecosystem and an important food source for zooplankton.

