



Plankton

Even though you may not see it, lakes are teeming with life. Some of the smallest life forms found in lakes are **plankton**. "Plankton" comes from a Greek word meaning to "drift" or "wander". Plankton are a diverse group of **organisms** living in large bodies of water that drift with the currents. Many are microscopic, though some can be seen by the naked eye.

Phytoplankton and **zooplankton** are the two main types of plankton.

Phytoplankton use the sun to make their own food through photosynthesis. Some examples of phytoplankton include algae and cyanobacteria.

Zooplankton are **animals** and they eat phytoplankton and bacteria and in turn are eaten by larger animals. Zooplankton are weak swimmers, but can move up and down in the water column. Plankton are at the base of the aquatic **food chain**.



Daphnia are a common zooplankton in Flathead Lake. PC: D. Drew (CC0 1.0)

To learn more about the importance of plankton, go to the following link and watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23mrtGckAH8>





Sampling for Zooplankton

Zooplankton are an important part of a lake food chain. Scientists collect zooplankton samples to identify what types and how many may live in a waterbody. Scientists use a plankton net to collect zooplankton. The thin mesh net is pulled through the water column and zooplankton are collected in a container at the bottom of the net. Scientists add a preservative to the plankton samples in the field so they can look at them at a later time in the laboratory with microscopes.



A zooplankton net. PC: Flathead Lake Biological Station

