

# Graptolites

520–350 MYA – EXTINCT

Graptolites were a group of colonial marine animals. The colony consisted of one or more 'hacksaw shaped' branches, called a theca, where the

individual animals lived. These thecae could be anywhere from 2–30 cm long.

Domain	Eukaryota
Kingdom	Animalia
Phylum	Hemichordata
Class	Graptolithina

## Fossil Record

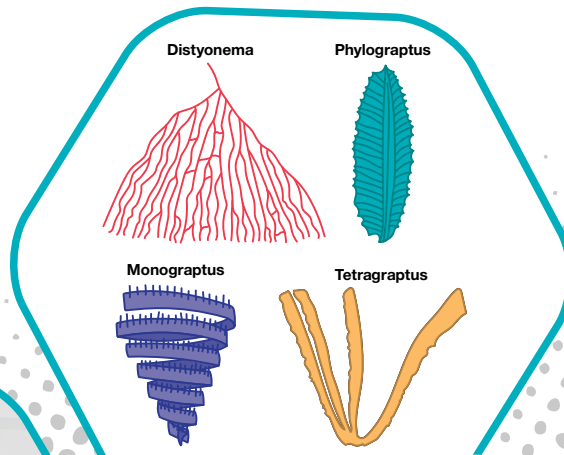
Graptolites first appeared in the fossil record in rocks from the middle Cambrian, approximately 500 million years ago, and were thought to have gone extinct in the early Carboniferous. However, there is debate about whether they are actually extinct. Rare marine animals called pterobranchs, may be very closely related descendants.

## Habitat and Lifestyle

Graptolites lived attached to rocks or floating debris like seaweed, or were free-floating in the water column, some graptolites had their own balloon-like floats. Scientists are unsure about the physical appearance of the graptolite, but suspect it had a series of feathery tentacles, similar to crinoids, for filtering small food particles out of seawater.



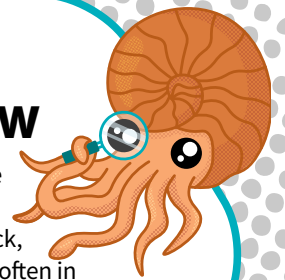
Ordovician graptolite fossil. Image from James Cropper, Geoscience Australia.



Four common graptolite species, each with a distinct arrangement of thecae.

## DID YOU KNOW

Graptolites got their name from the Greek words *graptos* written and *lithos* rock, because they are found most often in black shales where they are flattened and carbonised and look like simple pencil-marks on the rock.



Explore the complete series



Explore more resources from this series