



Prickly Predators

Crown-of-thorns starfish are found along the Great Barrier Reef. They have up to 21 arms and have poisonous, needle-sharp spines covering its body. The crown-of-thorns starfish eat coral. They eat by bringing their stomach out through their mouth and engulf their food. After they have finished eating, the stomach retracts back into the body via the mouth. Sometimes, the crown-of-thorns eat corals faster than the corals can grow. This can cause an outbreak of the crown-of-thorns starfish and is bad news for the coral as they will decline in numbers. However, corals can usually recover after an outbreak. Outbreaks can be stopped by their natural predators (trigger fish and humphead wrasse), or they can be managed by using control programs.

Questions

1. How many arms can a crown-of-thorns starfish have?
2. What does a crown-of-thorns starfish eat?
3. What happens to the corals if there is an outbreak of crown-of-thorns starfish?
4. What can keep crown-of-thorns starfish numbers down?

