



Down here, everyone lives on top of each other. Some animals take up residence in coral mounds as tall as houses. Others prefer hideouts hidden deep within the corals' crevices. And the architects of these vibrant underwater worlds? **CORAL POLYPS** (*pol-ips*) – tiny animals no bigger than a grain of sand.

GREEN TURTLE

CORAL GROUPE

DAY OCTOPUS

Coral polyps get their energy and beautiful colours from **ALGAE** living inside the coral's tissues. They work together: the algae feed the polyp, and the polyp provides a home, one that it constructs a millimetre at a time.

Polyps are hardworking builders that attach themselves to rocks – sometimes multiplying in their thousands – forming colonies of sac-shaped buds, their mouths surrounded by whorls of stinging tentacles.

Hard coral is made when the polyps absorb calcium carbonate (limestone) from the water to build a skeleton. In one year, the slowest growers can gain three millimetres, while the fastest shoot up 100 millimetres (that's only the width of an adult's hand!).

It's no wonder some reefs are millions of years in the making.