

Springtime in the Bay of Biscay



[1]Springtime in the Bay of Biscay, off the coast of France, as in most places, is a season of abundant growth. On April 20, 2013, the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) aboard NASA's Aqua satellite captured this true-color image of the dynamic growth of a springtime phytoplankton bloom.

The swirling colors indicate the presence of vast numbers of phytoplankton — tiny plant-like microorganisms that live in both fresh and salt water. Although these organisms live year-round in the Bay of Biscay, it is only when conditions are right that explosive blooms occur. In spring, the lengthening sunlight, the increased nutrient load swept into the Bay from ocean currents and from snowmelt carried by freshwater rivers, combined with warming waters create the perfect conditions to spur phytoplankton in to tremendous growth. The result is a swirling, multi-hued discoloration that can be easily seen from space.

Each year, typically from March through April, such blooms occur in the Bay of Biscay. By May, however, conditions are not as favorable and the blooms fade, then disappear.

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