

Tropical Rainforest Fact Sheet



Tropical rainforests are dominated by evergreen, broad-leaved trees that form a dense upper layer or canopy that shades an amazing array of plants growing on the forest floor or clinging to the trunks of trees.

Location: Tropical rainforests are found in wet tropical lands north and south of the Equator. There are large areas of rainforest south and east Asia, Africa, South America and Central America. There are also areas of rainforest along Australia's east coast.

Climate: The climate of tropical rainforests is humid, warm and wet. Annual rainfall is more than 2,000 millimetres a year. Average temperatures are between 20° and 25°C. Beneath the canopy, however, the average temperature in a tropical rainforest is around 18°C.

Plants: Tropical rainforests contain two-thirds of all the flowering plants found on earth. The forest floor is covered by a layer nutrient-rich leaf litter called humus. Without the nutrients supplied by the rotting humus, the soils of the rainforest would be very poor and unable to support the rainforest vegetation. Some trees and plants found in a tropical rainforest include fig trees, palms, ferns, orchids, vines and epiphytes. Epiphytes (sometimes called air plants) are plants that grow on another plant for support. They have no attachment to the ground or obvious nutrient source but do not take nutrients from the plants on which they grow.

Animals: Tropical rainforest provide a habitat for a vast number of different insects, invertebrates, birds, reptiles, amphibians and mammals. The animals will, however, vary according to the region in which the rainforest is located. Different animals also live in different layers of the rainforest. For example, birds live in the canopy (upper layer of the rainforest) and in the crowns of the forest's tallest trees. Large animals (like jaguars) live on the forest floor, while others (like the howler monkey and sloths) live in trees). Insects are found almost everywhere.

Rainforest loss: Protecting the world's remaining forests will play an important role in slowing the rate of climate change and protecting the world's plants and animals. Sadly, however, the destruction of forests continues. We are foregoing the long-term benefits of forests for short-term financial gain.

Forests still cover about 30 per cent of the world's land area, but they are disappearing at an alarming rate. Between 1990 and 2019, the world an area larger than the country of South Africa.

Since humans started clearing forests, almost half of the earth's forests have been lost. Almost 20 per cent of the Amazon's rainforest has been destroyed over the past 50 years.

We need trees for many reasons. Importantly, they absorb heat-trapping greenhouse gases such as CO₂ that human activities emit. As these gases enter the atmosphere, global temperatures increase. The plants of the rainforest also supply many of the medicines that keep us healthy.

Agriculture, especially the grazing of livestock accounts for more than half of all deforestation. Timber cutting, wildfires and the growth of cities account for the rest. In Malaysia and Indonesia, forests are cut down to make way for palm oil plantations. In the Amazon, cattle ranching, and soy plantations are the main causes of deforestation.