

Rainforest Ecosystems

Cross-Curricular Focus; Life Sciences



Rainforest ecosystems are found near the equator, the center imaginary line of latitude that runs east and west around Earth. Tropical rainforests have more rain than other areas. The weather is warm and humid all year long. There is lots of sunlight.

Living things are **abundant** in the rainforests. There are thousands of species of animals and even more kinds of plants. Their needs for sun, water and warmth are all met by the conditions of the rainforest. The excellent conditions allow them to **thrive**. There is an amazing amount and variety of plants in that one location. This variety makes the rainforests a major source of Earth's overall oxygen supply.

Tropical rainforests have layers of life. The uppermost layer is called the **canopy**. Very mature, tall trees stretch out their branches and leaves, nearly blocking out the sun in some places. Many animals live high in this green, leafy habitat. You can find monkeys, tree frogs and many different species of birds.

Below the treetops is a second layer, called the understory. The understory is shaded by the canopy. Not as much sunlight reaches the plants in the understory. Bushes and growing trees make up the understory. It is home to birds, reptiles and small climbing animals.

The third layer, the forest floor, is busy with life. Vines, shrubs, mosses, ferns, flowers and large predator animals, such as jaguars, can be found there. Small animals burrow into the ground and live in bushes. Leaf-cutter ants and other insects busily hunt for food and water.

Rainforests contain some of Earth's greatest biological treasures. Many medicines are made from plants found there. Scientists have used them to make some promising drugs for treating cancer and AIDS. Food sources are very rich, too. There are over 3,000 fruits alone. Rainforests also grow the vegetables and grains that make up most of the world's daily diet. You can find corn, potatoes, rice and squash there. Spices like ginger, cinnamon, and chocolate grow alongside coffee and a variety of nuts. The rainforests produce all this in addition to providing oxygen for Earth. The rainforests are very valuable to the planet.

Name: _____

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

1) What is the canopy of the rainforest?

2) Why might a scientist be interested in the rainforests? _____

3) Do you think you could survive alone in a rainforest? Why, or why not?

4) Describe the conditions that make a rainforest a good place for many living things.

5) Rainforests are found near what imaginary line?

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Name: Key

Answer the following questions based on the reading passage. Don't forget to go back to the passage whenever necessary to find or confirm your answers.

Actual wording may vary.

1) What is the canopy of the rainforest?

the top layer

2) Why might a scientist be interested in the rainforests? because of the plants,

animals and possible medicines

3) Do you think you could survive alone in a rainforest? Why, or why not?

student's choice

4) Describe the conditions that make a rainforest a good place for many living things.

It is warm with a lot of sunlight and rain.

5) Rainforests are found near what imaginary line?

the equator