

Rainforests

What is a Rainforest?

Rainforests are huge forests that get a lot of rain. They are found in all continents of the world apart from Antarctica (as it's too cold there). There are two types of rainforest: tropical (in the tropical, warm zone near the Equator) and temperate (in the temperate zone further away from the Equator). Most rainforests are tropical, these are forests with tall trees, warm climates (weather patterns), and lots of rain. It can rain one inch of rain per day in some rainforests! The largest of these is the Amazon Rainforest in South America.



Fact File in Numbers

- 2% of the Earth's surface is covered in rainforest.
- 50% of the plants and animals of the world live in rainforests.
- $\frac{1}{5}$ of our fresh water is found in a rainforest in the Amazon Basin.
- $\frac{1}{4}$ of natural medicines have been found in rainforests.
- 70% + of the plants that are used to treat cancer are found **only** in the tropical rainforests.

The Canopy

The rainforest is so tightly packed with trees, that the branches and leaves at the top of the trees touch each other and make what is called a 'canopy', which acts a bit like a roof for the forest. The canopy can be about 30m above the ground. The canopy is hotter and drier during the day than other parts of the rainforest. Animals have adapted to live in the canopy by having loud calls to communicate in the thick foliage and some jump from tree to tree.

The Forest Floor

This is a dark because the canopy blocks a lot of the light and it is humid (damp), but it is still a very important part of the ecosystem. The floor is where dead animals and plants decompose (rot) and recycle all the nutrients and materials. Also, the larger animals are found here including tapirs, elephants, tigers and jaguars.

Why are they so important?

Rainforests do a few things that are critical to our life on Earth. One important thing that rainforests do is they use photosynthesis to take in carbon dioxide and make oxygen which we need to breathe and survive. This is why they are called 'The Lungs of The Earth'.

They also help keep our weather system stable by absorbing carbon dioxide, creating rainfall and keeping temperature stable. They also affect the water cycle as they hold so much water which condenses into the atmosphere.

So, how can we manage without them?

Questions about Rainforests

1. What fraction of our natural medicines have been found in rainforests?

2. Name the two types of rainforest.

3. Which rainforests are nearer The Equator – temperate or tropical?

4. Where in the rainforest is the canopy?

5. What is it about the canopy that makes it easy for animals to jump from tree to tree?

6. It is very crowded and leafy in the canopy. How do some animals communicate because of this when they cannot see each other?

7. Why is the forest floor dark?

8. Name one way that the rainforests affect our life on Earth.

9. In the fact file, why has the author emphasised the word 'only'.

10. Read the last line...what is your opinion and why?
