

Ecosystems Vocabulary

Vocabulary Term	Meaning/Definition
abiotic factors	nonliving parts of an ecosystem (sunlight, soil, temperature)
aquatic ecosystem	includes freshwater areas, estuaries, marine areas
bacteria	helps in the natural recycling process, a decomposer
balance	equilibrium in an ecosystem
biome	complex ecological community, extends over a large geographic area , consists of many ecosystems
biotic factors	living components of an ecosystem (the organisms)
carnivores	consumer that eats meat
co-exist	living in the same environment
community	interaction of all living things in an area
condensation	change of a vapor of gas into a liquid (i.e. condensation on a glass of lemonade in the summer)
conservation	sensible use of the earth's resources to avoid harming the environment
consumers	living things that eat food (i.e. animals) types of consumers: herbivore, carnivore, omnivore
control	part of an experiment that does not change, serves as the standard to compare other observations
deciduous	trees lose leaves in autumn/fall
decomposers	recycles matter and energy (examples from model ecosystem: aquarium snail, isopod), keeps the community clean by eating the dead organisms
decomposition	the breaking down of an organism back into nature
degrade	to make worse, harm
desert	little rain, extreme temperatures, drought resistant grass plants: sagebrush, cacti (adapted to conditions) animals: kangaroo rat, snakes, lizards, some birds, spiders, insects
ecology	study of the relationships between organisms and their environment
ecosystem	all living things in an area and their habitat (includes living and nonliving) abiotic factors + biotic factors = an ecosystem
environment	everything that surrounds an organism and influences it
estuary	where freshwater and salt water meet (coastal area)
eutrophication	increased nutrients in an ecosystem (i.e. too much fertilizer)
food chain	a picture that shows how each organism gets energy
food web	system of food chains
freshwater ecosystems	includes streams, rivers, lakes, marshes, swamps Salt levels are low, important nutrient to land plants and animals, supports a wide variety of plant and animal life
fungi	helps in the natural recycling process, a decomposer
germinate	the process of a seed beginning to sprout r beginning to grow into a plant
grasslands	also called savannas, rainfall is low or seasonal, dominant plant life is grass; other plants: buffalo grass, sunflower, goldenrods, clover large herbivores: bison, antelope, zebras, prairie dogs
habitat	physical place where an organism lives
herbivores	consumer that eats plants
interdependence	the relationship between plants and animals in an ecosystem
isopods	small animals with a segmented thorax, each part of the thorax has its own pair of legs
marine ecosystems	includes ocean areas and seas, high salt content, warmer, lots of sunlight

	near surface (examples: coral reefs, tide pools, beaches, ocean floor)
niche	position of an organism in a community of plants and animals
nutrients	substance required to nourish an organism
omnivores	consumers that eat both plants and animals
organisms	living things
pH	measured on a scale of 0-14, where 7 is neutral (distilled water), 0-6 includes acid (orange juice), 7-14 includes basic (fertilizer, ammonia)
photosynthesis	chemical process where plants make their own food
pollutant	substance with damaging effects on the environment (i.e. acid rain, over-fertilization, road salt)
pollution	putting harmful things into the environment
population	a group of the same type of organism living in an area
precipitation	Liquid and solid forms of water from the atmosphere (examples: rain, snow, sleet, hail, drizzle, dew)
predator	an animal that eats another animal for food
prey	the animal that gets eaten
primary consumers	use plants for energy (anything that eats plants) examples: insects, fish, lizards, mice, birds, deer
producers	makes own food, gets energy from the Sun, example: plants
recycle	reusing materials
scavenger	feeds on dead organic matter that could have been killed by a predator
secondary consumers	get energy from primary consumers
taiga	located in parts of Canada, Europe and Asia; has evergreen <i>coniferous</i> forests (trees with cones), soil is acidic and difficult for plants to grow, ground covered in snow most of year, animals grow thick fur animals: moose, deer, mice, porcupines, snowshoe hares
temperate forest	the biome where we live, deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves), medium rainfall, foliage changes color in autumn (fall) trees: redbud, oak, maple, pine, dogwood, pine animals: squirrels, deer, foxes, bears
terrestrial	land
tertiary consumers	get their energy from secondary consumers
toxin	poison produced by a living organism
tropical rain forest	abundant rainfall, very humid, trees have dense canopies, floor does not get much sunlight, many species of animals and plants plants: vines, ferns, orchids, large and small trees animals: orangutans, insects, sloths, jaguars
tundra	treeless biome, below the soil is a thin layer of permafrost (permanently frozen ground), located near the northernmost part of earth, summer temperatures are around freezing, grasses and small trees are present, mosses and lichens grow well animals: reindeer, caribou, polar bears, arctic wolves, ptarmigans
variable	something in an experiment that can be changed
water cycle	evaporation, condensation, precipitation; continual process