

# The Tropical Rainforest

Rainforest Series, Part 1 - by Mikki Sadil

Tropical rainforests are among the most mysterious of all geographical biomes in the world. A biome is an area with very distinctive plants and animals that have adapted to life in that particular environment.

Rainforests have covered large portions of the Earth for millions of years, and can have trees that are 1,000 years-old or more. They are called *rainforests* because they are among the wettest areas on Earth, receiving anywhere from 80 to 100 inches of rain a year. In most rainforests, the temperature ranges from 70 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit all year long, and the air is almost always humid.

Rainforests have four very distinct layers of trees. The first is the emergent layer which has giant trees growing from 100 to 240 feet tall. These trees have umbrella-shaped crowns that grow high above the rest of the forest. They have their own distinct plant and animal life.

The next layer is called the canopy. These trees grow up to 130 feet tall, and they form a tight canopy, or covering, over the rest of the forest which allows very little sunlight to come down. The branches and trunks of these trees are covered with smaller plants and appear to be tied together with hundreds of vines. About 90% of all rainforest animals live way up high in the canopy.

The third layer is the understory, and it's very shady. Only about 15% of the sunlight from the canopy falls, and it tends to be very warm and humid. Trees and leafy plants that require little sun grow here, with the trees growing to about 60 ft. This layer has many smaller trees, shrubs, vines, and plants, but little air movement. There are many animals and insects living in this layer.

The final layer of the rainforest is the forest floor. It is surprisingly dark and less than 2% of the sun's light reaches this area. Because the sun's rays don't shine on the ground, there is very little plant life on the forest floor. It is an area covered with fallen leaves, seeds, dead flowers, and fruits and branches that decompose very quickly. It also has a distinctive variety of animals and plants that live here.



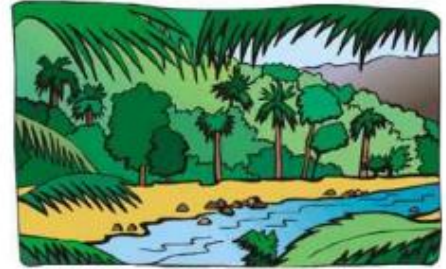
## Rainforest Facts

- Rainforests produce about 40% of the world's oxygen.
- About 25% of all medicines come from rainforest plants.
- 1,400 plants in the rainforest are believed to offer cures for cancer.



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1. In a rainforest, the tallest trees can grow...
- a. almost 200 feet tall
  - b. more than 200 yards tall
  - c. over 270 feet tall
  - d. almost 250 feet tall

2. The forest floor tends to be very dark. Why?

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3. What is a biome?

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4. Most animals that live in the rainforest live in the...

- a. emergent layer
- b. canopy
- c. understory
- d. forest floor

5. Read the following sentence from the article and choose the best definition for the underlined word.

*In most rainforests, the temperature ranges from 70 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit all year long, and the air is almost always humid.*

The underlined word means...

- a. difficult to breathe
- b. containing lots of oxygen
- c. warm and comfortable
- d. containing lots of water vapor

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Match each vocabulary word on the left with its definition on the right.



\_\_\_\_ 1. giant

\_\_\_\_ 2. umbrella

\_\_\_\_ 3. canopy

\_\_\_\_ 4. decompose

\_\_\_\_ 5. Fahrenheit

\_\_\_\_ 6. mysterious

\_\_\_\_ 7. adapted

a. difficult to understand

b. adjusted to certain conditions

c. covering

d. device for keeping rain or sun off of a person

e. decay; rot

f. huge

g. scale for measuring temperature commonly used in the USA

