

Ecosystems Vocabulary

Vocabulary Term	Meaning/Definition
abiotic factors *	nonliving parts of an ecosystem (sunlight, soil, temperature, air)
adaptation *	a change in order to fit in a new situation
algae blooms *	Too many algae crowd the water and block sunlight from reaching underwater grasses; caused by too many nutrients in water from sewer damage and fertilizer run-off
aquatic *	having to do with water
aquarium *	a glass or plastic container in which aquatic organisms can live and be observed
aquatic ecosystem	includes freshwater areas, estuaries, marine areas
bacteria	helps in the natural recycling process, a decomposer
balance	equilibrium in an ecosystem
biodiversity *	a wide variety of organisms
biome	complex ecological community, extends over a large geographic area , consists of many ecosystems
biotic factors *	living components of an ecosystem (the organisms) such as plants and animals; organisms depend on abiotic factors for survival
carnivore *	organism (consumer) that gets its energy from eating meat/animal flesh
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
consumer *	an organism that gets its energy from eating other organisms types of consumers: herbivore, carnivore, omnivore
control *	part of an experiment that does not change, serves as the standard to compare other observations; example: in the pollution investigation, the one model ecosystem not undergoing pollution
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
dependent relationships *	relying on another; for example, plants rely on the sun for light
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; a scientist in this area is called an ecologist
ecosystem *	an interconnected community of 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)

fair test *	changing only one variable and keeping the other conditions the same
fertile *	rich in nutrients; often used to describe soil
food chain *	a graphic that traces energy flow in an ecosystem; for example: sun → plants → fish → raccoon
food web	system of food chains
forest *	an area of land densely populated with trees
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
germination *	process by which seeds swell up and begin to sprout and develop roots
grassland *	a large, flat, area of land that is mostly populated by tall grasses and few trees; 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
herbivore *	consumer that gets its energy by eating plants and vegetation
interdependence	the relationship between plants and animals in an ecosystem
interdependent relationships *	relying on one another. For example, elodea is a producer that provides food for a snail. It also provides shelter for hiding and laying eggs and adding oxygen to the water. The snail eats dead leaves and adds fertilizer in the form of feces. The snail also gives off carbon dioxide, which plants use for photosynthesis.
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)
model *	Representation of objects, processes, or phenomena that look like, function like, describe, or explain the real thing; simplified version of the real object that helps us understand how things work
niche *	the specific role an organism plays within its ecosystem
nutrients	substance required to nourish an organism
omnivore *	consumer that gets its energy from eating 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 in which plants use carbon dioxide and sunlight to create sugar for themselves for food
pollutant *	substance with negative/damaging effects on the ecosystem when spread through air, water, or soil (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
producer *	makes own food through a process called photosynthesis, gets energy from the sun, example: plants
radiation *	a way that energy is transferred from the sun to the earth

recycle	reusing materials
scavenger	feeds on dead organic matter that could have been killed by a predator
secondary consumers	get energy from primary consumers
sediment *	tiny bits of soil that are often transported by water or wind
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
terrarium *	a closed glass or plastic container where terrestrial organisms can live and be observed
terrestrial *	having to do with the land or earth
tertiary consumers	get their energy from secondary consumers
toxin	poison produced by a living organism
trade-off *	the act of giving up one thing in order to get another
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 *	the part of an experiment that is changed or tested; in this case, the variable is the addition of a pollutant (salt, fertilizer, vinegar)
water cycle	evaporation, condensation, precipitation; continual process
watershed *	an area of land where the waters all drain into the same place