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Ecozones Defined

Around the world, forests are classified into five basic climate groups according to temperature. From warmest to coolest, these climate groups are tropical, subtropical, temperate, boreal, and polar. They are highlighted in the chart below, with the thermometer indicating temperature.

Scientists have further divided the five climate groups into 26 different ecozones defined by different precipitation levels, as shown below.¹

In the chart, precipitation levels are indicated by the rain gauge. You can see that tropical rainforests are hot and wet, whereas temperate forests are cooler and drier.²

Since higher elevations affect both temperature and precipitation, mountain forests are considered to be a separate ecological zone within each climate group. The four mountain ecological zones are shown at the bottom of the chart.

Global Ecozones

Temperature (average annual) Hot (100°F) Cold (0°F Climate Groups: Tropical Subtropical Temperate Boreal Polar Wet 90+ in Tropical rainforest 80 in Precipitation (average annual) Thick layers of 70 in permafrost limit plant growth, 60 in Tropical moist forest which includes 50 in Subtropical flowering plants, Temperate humid forest oceanic forest dwarf shrubs, 40 in herbs, grasses, Tropical dry forest 30 in Subtropical mosses, and dry forest Temperate lichens 20 in continental forest Boreal tundra Tropical shrubland Subtropical 10 in Temperate steppe woodland steppe Boreal Dry Temperate desert Tropical desert Subtropical desert coniferous forest 0 in Boreal Subtropical Temperate Tropical 4 Mountain mountain mountain mountain mountain Systems: (higher than (higher than (higher than (higher than 3,300 ft) 2,600 ft) 2,600 ft) 2,000 ft)

- 1 This classification system was adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2010.
- 2 The colors in the chart match those shown on the Global Ecozones Map.

Grades 6-8