



LEAF

Trees | Wildlife | Water | Biodiversity | Habitat | Ecosystem | Urban | Timber | Wood Products | Careers | Climate Change

What is a Forest? Forests are fascinating and complex ecosystems. The defining feature of a forest is dense growth of trees. Besides trees, forests are made up of soil, water, other plants, animals, birds and insects. Many of these living things are dependent on other living things within the forest for their survival. The type and extent of forest is determined by temperature, soils, adequate water, growing season and altitude. Forests produce a great deal of oxygen and absorb and store carbon. They also serve to reduce water runoff, conserving soils and protecting water quality.

In general deciduous trees (those that lose their leaves in the fall) dominate our forests in the Eastern U.S., while coniferous trees (those that keep their leaves year-round) predominate in western forests. Forests provide people with jobs and produce many different wood and non-wood products such as timber, firewood, food products and medicine. Many of our private, state and national forests are sustainably managed for multiple uses including ecological, recreational and timber production. Particularly in urban areas, forests and trees provide cooling shade, helping to reduce the impact of heat caused by buildings, concrete and human activities.

LEAF is a Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) program. [Learn more.](#)

Driving Questions

- ✓ How can we, as city planners, determine the value of trees in our community?
- ✓ How can we, as foresters, manage our forests for multiple uses?
- ✓ How can we, as wildlife biologists and forest ecologists, enhance forest habitat on our school grounds and in our local communities?
- ✓ How can we, as forest hydrologists, manage the forests for water quality and conservation?



TOOLS AND RESOURCES

[Top 10 Tips](#) | [Fast Facts](#) | [Standards Alignment](#) | [Sample Action Plan](#) | [LEAF Audit](#) | [Resources](#)