GRASSLANDS BIOME

The grasslands biome can be divided up into the temperate grasslands and tropical grasslands. On this page we will discuss the temperate grasslands. Tropical grasslands are also called savannas. You can read more about this biome on the [savanna biome](https://www.ducksters.com/science/ecosystems/savanna_biome.php) page.  
  
**What are grasslands?**  
  
Grasslands are wide expanses of land filled with low growing plants such as grasses and wildflowers. The amount of rain is not enough to grow tall trees and produce a forest, but it is enough to not form a desert. The temperate grasslands have seasons including a hot summer and a cold winter.  
  
**Where are the major world grasslands?**  
  
Grasslands are generally located between deserts and forests. The major temperate grasslands are located in central North America in the United States, in Southeast South America in Uruguay and [Argentina](https://www.ducksters.com/geography/country/argentina_history_timeline.php), and in Asia along the southern portion of Russia and Mongolia.

**Types of Temperate Grasslands**  
  
Each major area of grasslands in the world has its own characteristics and is often called by other names:

* Prairie - Grasslands in North America are called the prairies. They cover around 1.4 million square miles of the central United States including some of Canada and Mexico.
* Steppes - The steppes are grasslands that cover southern Russia all the way to the Ukraine and Mongolia. The steppes stretch over 4,000 miles of Asia including much of the fabled Silk Road from China to Europe.
* Pampas - The grasslands in South America are often called the pampas. They cover around 300,000 square miles between the Andes Mountains and the Atlantic Ocean.

**Animals in the Grasslands**  
  
A variety of animals live in the grasslands. These include prairie dogs, wolves, turkeys, eagles, weasels, bobcats, foxes, and geese. A lot of smaller animals hide down in the grasses such as snakes, mice, and rabbits.  
  
The North American plains were once full of [bison](https://www.ducksters.com/animals/american_bison.php). These large herbivores ruled the plains. It is estimated there were millions of them before the Europeans arrived and began slaughtering them in the 1800s. Although there are numerous bison in commercial herds today, there are few in the wild.

**Plants in the Grasslands**  
  
Different kinds of grass grow in different areas of the grasslands. There are actually thousands of different kinds of grasses that grow in this biome. Where they grow usually depends on the amount of rain that area gets. In wetter grasslands, there are tall grasses that can grow up to six feet high. In dryer areas the grasses grow shorter, maybe only a foot or two tall.  
  
Types of grasses that grow here include buffalo grass, blue grama grass, needle grass, big bluestem, and switchgrass.  
  
Other plants that grow here include sunflowers, sagebrush, clover, asters, goldenrods, butterfly weed, and butterweed.

**Fires**  
  
Wildfires can play an important role in the biodiversity of the grasslands. Scientists believe that occasional fires help to rid the land of old grasses and allow for new grasses to grow, bringing new life to the area.  
  
**Farming and Food**  
  
The grassland biome plays an important role in human farming and food. They are used to grow staple crops such as wheat and corn. They are also good for grazing livestock such as cattle.

**The Shrinking Grasslands**  
  
Unfortunately, human farming and development has caused the grassland biome to steadily shrink. There are conservation efforts going on to try and save the grasslands that are left as well as the endangered plants and animals.

**Facts about the Grassland Biome**

* Forbs are plants that grow in the grasslands that aren't grasses. They are leafy and soft-stemmed plants such as sunflowers.
* Prairie dogs are rodents that live in burrows under the prairies. They live in large groups called towns that can sometimes cover hundreds of acres of land.
* It is thought that there were over a billion prairie dogs on the Great Plains at one point.
* Other grassland animals need the prairie dog to survive, but the population is declining.
* Only around 2% of the original prairies of North America still exist. Much of it has been turned into farmland.
* Fires on grasslands can move as fast as 600 feet per minute