TAIGA BIOME

The Taiga is one of the three main forest biomes. The other two are the temperate forest and the tropical rainforest. The taiga is the driest and coldest of the three. The taiga is sometimes called the boreal forest or the coniferous forest. It is the largest of all the land biomes.

**What makes a forest a taiga forest?**

The taiga has several characteristics that distinguish it from the other forest biomes:

* Evergreen trees - This forest is covered with evergreen, or coniferous, [trees](https://www.ducksters.com/science/trees.php). These are trees that don't drop their leaves, or needles, in the winter. They keep their leaves so they can soak up as much sunlight for as long as possible. The dark green color of their leaves also helps them to soak up more sun and gain more energy through photosynthesis.
* Cold weather - The taiga has the coldest weather of the forest biomes. Winters can get as cold as -60 degrees F. Winter can last for six months with the temperature averaging below freezing. Summers are warmer, but very short.
* Dry - The precipitation is only slightly more than the desert or the tundra. Average precipitation is between 12 and 30 inches per year. It falls as rain in the summer and snow in the winter.
* Thin layer of soil - Because the leaves don't fall from the trees, like in the temperate forest, the layer of good soil is thin. Also, the cold weather causes a slow rate of decay taking it longer for nutrients to get back into the soil.
* Short growing season - With a long winter and short summer, plants don't have a lot of time to grow in the taiga. The growing season only lasts for around three months. This compares to at least six months in the temperate forest and a year round growing season in the rainforest.

**Where are the taiga forests located in the world?**

These forests are located in the far north typically between the temperate forest biome and the tundra biome. On the globe this is between 50 degrees latitude north and the Arctic Circle. The largest taiga forest covers much of northern Russia and Siberia. Other major taiga forests include North America (Canada and Alaska) and Scandinavia (Finland, Norway, and Sweden).



**Plants of the Taiga**

The dominant plant in the taiga is the coniferous evergreen tree. These trees include spruce, pine, cedar, and fir trees. They grow close together forming a canopy over the land, like an umbrella. This canopy soaks up the sun and only lets a little bit of sunlight through to the ground.

The conifers of the taiga produce their seeds in cones. They also have needles for leaves. Needles are good at holding in water and surviving the harsh cold winds each winter. The trees also grow in a cone shape. This helps the snow to slide off their branches.

Under the canopy of the trees, few other plants grow. In some moist areas plants such as ferns, sedges, mosses, and berries will grow.

**Animals of the Taiga**

The animals of the taiga must be able to survive the cold winters. Some animals, like [birds](https://www.ducksters.com/animals/birds.php), migrate to the south for the winter. Insects lay eggs that can survive the winter and then die. Other animals, like squirrels, store up food for the winter while others hibernate by going into a long, deep sleep.

Predators of this biome include the lynx, wolverines, Cooper's hawk, and wolves. Other animals include moose, the snowshoe hare, deer, elk, bears, chipmunks, bats, and woodpeckers.

Animals that live here have certain characteristics that help them to survive:

* They generally have thick fur or feathers to keep them warm.
* Many animals have sharp claws and are good at climbing trees.
* They have large feet to allow them to walk on the snow without sinking.
* Many of them change colors from white fur in the winter, to help them hide in the snow, to brown fur in the summer, to help them hide in the trees.

**Facts About the Taiga Biome**

* Taiga is a Russian word meaning forest.
* Many years ago the taiga was covered with [icy glaciers](https://www.ducksters.com/science/earth_science/glaciers.php).
* The word boreal means northern or "of the north wind".
* The occasional [wildfire](https://www.ducksters.com/science/earth_science/forest_fires.php) is good for the taiga as it opens up area for new growth. The trees have adapted to fires by growing tough bark. This will help some of them survive a mild fire.
* Many of the forest floor plants are perennials that come back each summer after laying dormant for the winter.
* These forests are endangered and shrinking due to logging.