

# THE RAIN FOREST:

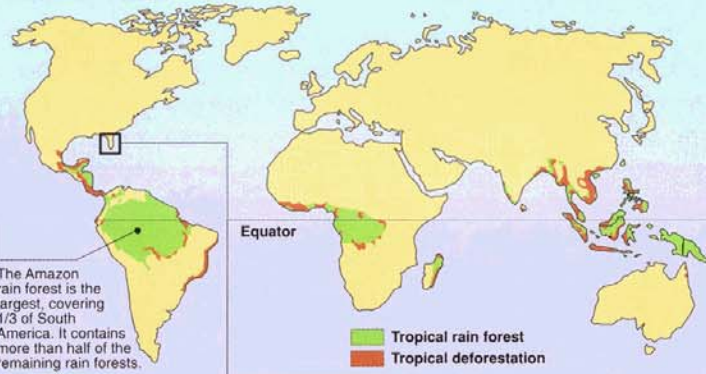
## A STATUS REPORT



Tropical rain forests are home to more than half the world's 10 million species of plants and animals. They generate an estimated 20 percent of the world's oxygen. Many of our foods and medicines have their origin in rain forests. Why does man insist on destroying them?

### What are they?

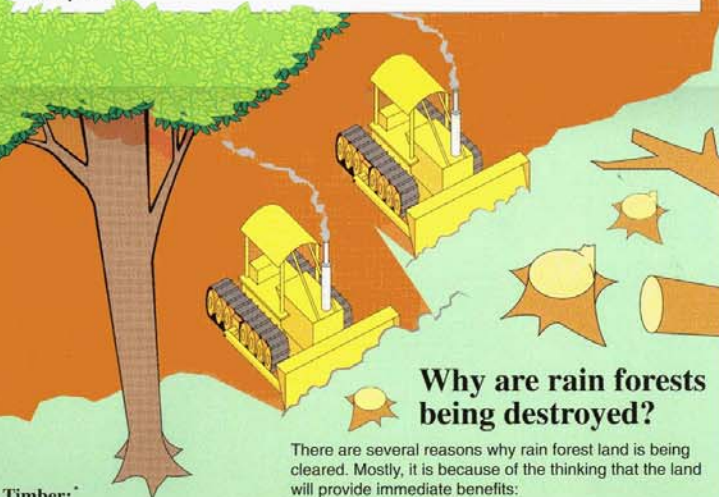
Tropical rain forests grow in a band along the equator, where the climate conditions allow for warm temperatures year-round. The temperature rarely rises above 93° F. or drops below 68° F. There is little variation in the seasons. Rain forests receive at least 100 inches of rain a year. Thundershowers may occur more than 200 days a year.



### Rates of destruction

Originally, the world's rain forests covered 4 billion acres. Fewer than 2.5 billion acres remain. Most of the deforestation has occurred over the last 45 years.

- 80 acres are destroyed every minute.
- At this rate, today's forests will be reduced by half by the year 2050.
- Along with this destruction, four species become extinct every hour.

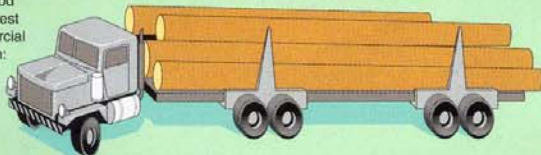


### Why are rain forests being destroyed?

There are several reasons why rain forest land is being cleared. Mostly, it is because of the thinking that the land will provide immediate benefits:

#### Timber:

Species of hardwood trees in the rain forest have great commercial value. Among them: Teak, mahogany, rosewood, balsa, sandalwood.



#### Agriculture:

Developing countries need land to produce crops. However, rain forest soil is not suited to agriculture and is depleted in a few years. Then, more land is cleared.



#### Other:

Other reasons include cattle ranching, mining and building dams for hydroelectric power.

### Why should we care?

The diverse plant and animal life in rain forests offers many benefits to man. These species are highly dependent on each other. Although there are many of them, these individual species are found only in relatively small areas and in small numbers. This makes them vulnerable to extinction when whole forests are cut down.

#### Food benefits:

Here are some of the foods we eat that originated in the rain forests.

- **Rice and corn**
- **Fruits:** Avocado, banana, breadfruit, coconut, grapefruit, guava, lemon, lime, mango, papaya, passion fruit, pineapple, plantain, tangerine.
- **Spices:** Allspice, black pepper, cayenne, chili, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg, paprika, sesame seeds, vanilla.
- **Other foods:** Brazil nuts, cashews, chocolate, coconut oil, cola, cucumbers, heart of palm, macadamia nuts, okra, peanuts, peppers, sugar cane, sweet potatoes, tapioca.



- **Some other products made from rain forest plants:** Rubber, eucalyptus (cough drops), perfumes, chewing gum.

#### Medicines:

The National Cancer Research Institute has identified 2,000 plants that contain cancer-healing properties. 70 percent are found only in the rain forest. One of every four drugs purchased owes its origin to a rain forest plant or animal. Here are some medicines derived from the rain forest.

- **Curare:** From Curare lianas (a type of vine). A muscle relaxant. Used in treatment of multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease.
- **Cortisone and Diosgenin:** From wild yams. Used in birth control pills, sex hormones, steroids, asthma and arthritis treatment.
- **Quinine:** From chinchona tree. Treatment for malaria and pneumonia.
- **Vincristine:** From Madagascar periwinkle. Anti-cancer drug fights leukemia and is a primary treatment for Hodgkin's disease.
- Also, the venom of hundreds of different spiders is being investigated for possible medicinal uses.



#### Indigenous people:

Rain forests are home to thousands of indigenous people. They rely on the forest for food and shelter. When rain forests are destroyed, human diversity is diminished. Vast stores of knowledge of the uses of rain forest plants and animals are lost when tribal societies vanish.

#### Other reasons:

Scientists think deforestation could alter the ozone layer and affect rainfall patterns and air temperatures over the entire Earth.

Clearing and burning the rain forest for farming and cattle grazing releases vast amounts of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide, all contributing to global warming (greenhouse effect).

### Want to know more?

The Rainforest Alliance will help you organize community projects for children.

For information, write:  
**Rainforest Alliance**  
 665 Broadway, Suite 500  
 N.Y., N.Y. 10012  
 (phone) 212-677-1900

**On the back:**  
 Under the canopy. Life inside the rain forest.

**Other titles available. Check your county library**

- *Conserving Rain Forests* by Martin Banks
- *The Rain Forest* by Billy Goodman
- *People of the Tropical Rain Forest*, edited by Julie Sloan Denslow and Christine Padoch

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia; Rainforest Alliance; Cleveland Metroparks Zoo; *New Scientist*, Aug. 17, 1991; *Ad Astra*, May 1992; *Conserving Rain Forests*, by Martin Banks; *The Rain Forest*, by Billy Goodman; *National Geographic*, December 1991.