



What is deforestation?

KS2

KS3

Ages 7-14 ⌚ 2 min read

Deforestation is the permanent removal of forests to make way for other uses of the land. When trees are cut down faster than new ones can grow back, entire forests disappear — sometimes forever.

Why Do People Cut Down Forests?

Most forests aren't cleared for no reason. People need space for farms to grow food like soybeans and palm oil, or to raise cattle for beef. Sometimes forests are cleared to build cities, roads, or mines. In many developing countries, families also cut down trees for firewood to cook their meals or to sell timber for money.

The problem isn't that people have these needs — it's the speed and scale. Modern machinery can clear enormous areas incredibly quickly, much faster than nature can replace what's lost.

Think of a forest like a massive library that took centuries to build. Deforestation is like burning down entire sections of this library faster than new books can be written and shelved. Once those books are gone, all the knowledge they contained vanishes too.

What Happens When Forests Disappear?

Forests do much more than just look pretty. They're like giant air purifiers, absorbing carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas that causes climate change) and releasing oxygen that we breathe. When forests are cut down, not only do we lose these benefits, but all that stored carbon gets released back into the atmosphere.

Forests are also home to about 80% of the world's land animals and plants. When their homes are destroyed, many species become endangered or extinct. This isn't just sad for the animals — it disrupts entire ecosystems that have developed over thousands of years.

The Scale of the Problem

Every year, we lose about 10 million hectares of forest — that's roughly the size of South Korea disappearing annually. The Amazon rainforest alone loses an area about the size of a football pitch every single second.

But here's some hope: people around the world are working to slow deforestation through better farming methods, replanting programs, and laws that protect important forests. Some companies now promise to only buy products that don't contribute to deforestation, and countries are creating more protected areas where trees can't be cut down.

Understanding deforestation helps us make better choices about the products we buy and support efforts to protect the forests we have left.