Rainforest energy and nutrient flows

FACT SHEET 12









Nutrient incorporation in plant biomass

Nutrients are the food materials which plants use to promote growth.

The decomposer system in the soil is the major energy pathway of forest ecosystem. Without the activity of soil organism, nutrients would become locked up and be released only by fire or slow chemical reaction.

Plants take up nutrients through their roots.

Litterfall is the large amount of dead leaves, branches, flowers and fruits which are shed from the canopy, carrying nutrients from the forest biomass to the soil.

Throughfall occurs when nutrients, mainly potassium, are leached from leaves by rain and carried to the forest floor. **Stemflow** is water running down branches and trunks which also removes nutrients from the canopy to the leaf litter.

Litter decomposition

Because of the high rate of decomposition, the leaf litter of rainforests is not as deep as the leaf litter of eucalypt forest, although seasonal variation does occur.

Stream discharge