



Fact Sheet

What are Ecosystem Services?

Ecosystem services are the things that nature does which benefit people. Some of these services are easy to appreciate: providing us with food, fibre and fuel; creating wide open spaces and beautiful vistas which make us feel good. Other services which are provided by ecosystems are not so immediately obvious: climate regulation, improving air & water quality, preventing floods, forming new soil and cycling nutrients through the environment.



We can classify these services into four categories:



Provisioning Services

Products which nature helps us to make such as food; raw materials; medicines; fresh water (plants can influence the quantity of water available locally) and ornamental resources (e.g. flowers).



Regulating Services

Regulation of our natural assets such as air quality (e.g. trees produce O₂ and remove pollution); carbon absorption and storage; water levels and purity; erosion control; pests and diseases; pollination.

Cultural Services

Non-material benefits we get from nature such as aesthetic appreciation of the environment; recreational enjoyment; education (art, culture and science) and spiritual or religious benefits.



Supporting Services

Services which allow all the others to happen such as photosynthesis; soil formation; the movement of water from ocean to land; nutrient cycling and the maintenance of the gene pool.



Why it is Important to Think About Ecosystem Services

It can be easy to take lots of our ecosystem services for granted. If we concentrate too hard on maximising just one service, such as food production, we can reduce or destroy the environment's ability to provide us with many of the other services.