



## Colorado Climate



Colorado climate is complicated and usually described as cool and dry. The mountains of Colorado influence how wet or dry different areas of the state are. The Colorado climate is often described as semi-arid. The western third of Colorado is very dry and can get very hot in the summer. The tall peaks of the "14'ers" get more moisture than any other part of the state which makes them great for skiing or snowshoeing during the cold winter months. The grassy eastern plains of our state are still considered dry and get the majority of their moisture in spring and summer. In the summer months, the upslope of storms from the east usually send thunderstorms rolling across the state. This is Colorado, if you do not like the weather wait 5 minutes and it will change.

### What to Expect Each Season in Colorado



- ◇ Temperatures are hotter
- ◇ Days are long
- ◇ Nights are short
- ◇ Plants grow all season
- ◇ Afternoon thunderstorms form

- ◇ Temperatures change often
- ◇ Temperatures warm up
- ◇ Nights gradually get shorter
- ◇ Days gradually get longer
- ◇ It can rain or snow

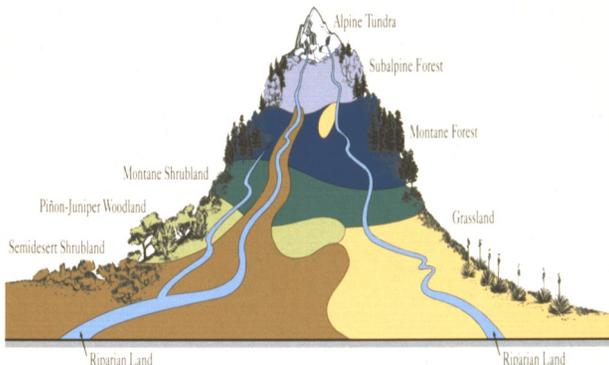


- ◇ Temperatures change often
- ◇ Temperatures cool down
- ◇ Days gradually get shorter
- ◇ Nights gradually get longer
- ◇ It can rain or snow

- ◇ Temperatures are colder
- ◇ Temperatures change often
- ◇ Days are short
- ◇ Nights are long
- ◇ Rain, ice or snow can fall



## Colorado Life Zones



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Life zones are geographic regions defined by the plants and animals that live and grow there. In 1991, the Denver Museum of Natural History developed the eight-ecosystem classification and provided a new way to view Colorado's topography.

**Grassland:** Colorado Grasslands are a part of the Great Plains and cover the eastern third of the state with elevations below 5,500 feet. The swift fox, badgers and prairie dogs make their home here.

**Semidesert Shrubland:** This life zone covers a broad elevation of 5,000-10,000 feet. Many birds, such as sage grouse, hide among the shrubs that thrive in semidesert land.

**Piñon-Juniper Woodland:** These areas are widespread in the Colorado Plateau between 5,000-7,000 feet. Piñon pines and juniper trees grow where few others can survive. Elk, mule deer and piñon mice thrive in the warm, open ecosystem.

**Riparian Land:** If there is water, you're in riparian land. This area includes ponds, lakes, streams and rivers. This habitat is home to amphibians, fish and waterfowl.

**Montane Shrubland:** Thick scrub oak, mountain-mahogany and sumac blanket the grounds and in the fall the land turns orange and red. Chipmunks, bobcats and mountain lions nest or build dens in the 6,000-8,000 foot elevations.

**Montane Forest:** Many types of grasses, shrubs and wildflowers are found in this forest such as aspens and pines. The elevation of the ecosystem is 5,500-9,000 feet and birds are abundant in the forest.

**Subalpine Forest:** The dark, rich green forests found between 9,000 and 12,000 feet are cool and humid. Dense forests of spruce, firs, pines and aspens are home to voles, deer mice and red foxes.

**Alpine Tundra:** High above the trees in elevations above 12,000 feet few plants and animals live. Naturally tough, alpine plants grow in the rocky terrain and in the summer the vibrant colors of the alpine flowers transform the frozen tundra into beautiful blankets of color. Yellow-bellied marmots and white-tailed ptarmigans are just a couple of the animals that reside year round in the unforgiving land.

## Crystal Reservoir Self-Guided Nature Trail

Welcome! This trail guide takes you through natural habitats displaying a variety of plant and animal life, with corresponding numbered markers along the way. Your hike should take approximately 15-20 minutes. We hope that you enjoy your hike and if you have any questions please contact a Pikes Peak Ranger.

Help us preserve our trails:

- ◇ Please keep pets on a leash
- ◇ Please do not pick wildflowers
- ◇ Please do not disturb wildlife
- ◇ Please do not litter
- ◇ Please stay on the marked trail

Thank You!



This trail was designed and developed by dedicated Pikes Peak Staff for the development of our Interpretive Program Summer 2001

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**1** **Geology:** Pikes Peak is made up of "Pikes Peak" Granite. Take a look around and you will see small pieces of the pinkish colored rock under your feet. The north face of Pikes Peak has been carved out over millions of years by glacial activity. Erosion from the wind, rain, freezing and thawing produces the decomposing granite.

 Continue to left side of amphitheater

**2** **Limber Pine (*Pinus flexilis*):** This tree can be found all over Pikes Peak. It is generally short, reaching heights of 30-50 feet. The branches of this pine vary in length, producing a ragged appearance. The branches are very flexible and bend easily in the wind, giving the tree its name. The needles are 2-3.5 inches long, slender, and grow in bundles of five. The yellowish, mature pine cone is egg shaped and has thick scales. The seeds are favorites of birds such as Clark's Nutcrackers and Red Crossbills.



 Continue up the stairs to the right

**3** **Aspen Tree (*Populus tremuloides*):** Aspens are one of the most popular and colorful trees in Colorado. The leaves are attached to the twigs by long stems, and the leaves "quake" in the slightest breeze, hence it is often called the "Quaking Aspen".



**4** **Kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*):** Also known as Bearberry because bears eat the red berries that are produced each year. Thick, leathery evergreen leaves help this common mat-forming shrub survive on dry, sunny slopes of the Colorado mountains.



**5** **Creeping Juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*):** A sprawling, evergreen shrub with trailing branches less than 6 inches tall. This juniper has sharp, pointed needles. The plants with berries are female plants and the plants with egg-shaped pollen cones are male plants. Junipers are common in the rocky foothills and montane slopes throughout the Rocky Mountains.



**6** **Douglas Fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*):** Needles on pine trees are pointed and prickly but this fir has flat, soft friendly needles. This tree can grow up to 250 feet tall and has a distinct cone with 3-pointed brackets protruding between the scales. It looks like there are mice hiding in the cone with only their back legs and tail hanging out.



**7** **Green Gentian (*Frasera speciosa*):** Look around and you will see succulent looking plants with broad leaves. This plant takes 7-20 years to bloom. Notice the mature taller plants with green blooms. This plant is also called the "monument plant" because of the way it towers over other plants. Once this plant flowers, it will die.



**8** **Pikes Peak Life Zones:** While driving to the summit of Pikes Peak you pass through 4 of the 5 life zones. The first is the "foothills" zone as you pass through the Tollgate. When you reach Crystal Reservoir you are in the "montane" zone. Continuing up the highway you will pass into the "sub-alpine" life zone located at the Glen Cove Inn. Finally, on your way to the summit, past timberline, you enter the "alpine" life zone. Check out our "Colorado Life Zones" on the opposite side of this brochure for more information.

**9** **Traces of Wildlife:** Many creatures inhabit Pikes Peak including black bear, mountain lion, turkey, bobcat, elk, mule deer, rabbit, ground squirrel and chipmunks. Some people claim to have seen Bigfoot. Search for evidence of animals such as tracks, scat or marks on trees.



**10** **Ponderosa Pine (*Pinus ponderosa*):** This tree has long needles up to 7 inches in length arranged in bundles of 2-3. It is an easily identified conifer. It can grow as tall as 130 feet. It does not produce cones until it reaches about 25 years old. The cones have scales with sharp prickles on the ends. The bark fills the air with the sweet smell of vanilla or butterscotch especially when the bark is warmed by the sun. Go ahead - walk up and smell the bark!



 Look for the tall tree 60 feet to the right

**Englemann Spruce (*Picea engelmanni*):** This tree can grow up to 130 feet tall like the Ponderosa Pine. It has sharp four-sided needles that exude a pungent odor when it is crushed. Cones often grow in clusters. To identify this tree, look for the narrow spire-like crowns and whorls of drooping lower branches.



**11** **North Face Vista and Ranger Barb's Reflection Bench:** You have come to the end of your journey. We hope that you enjoyed your hike!



Please keep this for your enjoyment or return to the brochure box to be enjoyed again.