

Identifying the Four Regions of Texas

Why It Matters Now

The landforms, waterways, trees, and plants give each subregion its unique character.

TERMS & NAMES

subregion, Coastal Plains region, **escarpment**, **growing season**, North Central Plains region, **steppe**, Great Plains region, **aquifer**, Mountains and Basins region

OBJECTIVES

1. Identify the location of each natural subregion of Texas.
2. Compare the regions and subregions of Texas.

MAIN IDEA

As you learned in Chapter 1, Texas can be divided into four regions. Now you will see how the lands within each region can be further divided. By analyzing similarities and differences, we can further classify Texas into 11 subregions.

WHAT Would You Do?

Write your response to *Interact with History* in your Texas Notebook.



INTERACT WITH HISTORY

Imagine that you are a member of the Texas Film Commission. Your job is to persuade moviemakers to shoot their films in Texas. To do this, you must be able to direct them to a location that matches the setting of their story. Where in Texas might you send a film crew to shoot a horror movie about a mysterious forest creature? What if the movie were about rock climbers? What if it were about being stranded on an uninhabited planet? Explain your reasoning.

subregion *a smaller division of a geographic region*

escarpment *a cliff or abrupt break in the land's surface*

Dividing Up Texas

Natural regions are determined by physical geography features such as landforms, climate, and vegetation. Texas can be divided into four large natural regions: the Coastal Plains, North Central Plains, Great Plains, and Mountains and Basins regions. The first three natural regions can also be divided into smaller **subregions**. The Mountains and Basins region does not have subregions.

Coastal Plains Region

The Coastal Plains region includes about one-third of Texas. It extends east and south from the Balcones **Escarpment** to the Gulf of Mexico. Most of Texas's large cities are in the Coastal Plains. As a result, the Coastal Plains region is home to more people than any other part of Texas. About two out of every three Texans live in the Coastal Plains.

Piney Woods

The name Piney Woods accurately reflects this area of pine forests in Texas. This subregion extends from the Texas-Louisiana border to the



Texas Regions ★ 53



PLACE

Spanish and Mexican settlers lived in the South Texas Plain before the Texas Revolution, and many families still live there. Since then, others have continued to move in, creating a largely Hispanic population in the area. In fact, in most counties in the South Texas Plain, the population is over 75 percent Hispanic; in some counties, it is over 90 percent Hispanic. ● **If you were to visit South Texas, what languages would you most likely hear?**

The Blackland Prairie receives 30 to 45 inches of rain per year. The growing season is from 230 days in the north to 280 days in the south. Elevation ranges from 400 feet to nearly 800 feet above sea level. The soils of the Blackland Prairie are not good for growing most trees, so the vegetation is largely tall prairie grasses with a few hardwood trees.

Gulf Coastal Plain

The Gulf Coastal Plain forms a large arc that follows the coast of the Gulf of Mexico from the Sabine River westward for about 260 miles to Kingsville. It extends inland about 30 to 60 miles. Elevations in the Gulf Coastal Plain are generally below 100 feet, and the climate is humid. Rainfall varies from 50 inches near Beaumont to 25 inches in the Corpus Christi area. Temperatures are warm, and the growing season is long, from 240 days near Beaumont and Orange to as much as 309 days in Corpus Christi.

South Texas Plain

If you were to draw an imaginary line from San Antonio to Kingsville, the South Texas Plain would fall between that line and the Rio Grande. This area is about 270 miles long from north to south and about 250 miles wide from east to west. Elevations range from sea level to just under 1,000 feet above sea level. In this southernmost part of Texas, the climate is warm year round. The growing season ranges from 265 days near San Antonio to 341 days at Brownsville. Maximum rainfall is about 30 inches per year near San Antonio. The minimum is less than 20 inches near Laredo.

North Central Plains Region

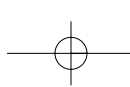
The North Central Plains region begins at the Balcones Escarpment and extends west as far as the Caprock Escarpment. The North Central Plains is an area of rolling plains often covered by small oak trees, mesquite, brush, and scattered grasses. The subregions of the North Central Plains are a series of land belts extending north and south through the north-central part of the state. These subregions become increasingly drier and higher in elevation from east to west.

Grand Prairie

This long, narrow belt extends from near the Red River southward almost to Temple and Killeen. Elevations range from 800 to 1,700 feet. The area gets about 30 inches of precipitation per year, with more rainfall in the east and less in the west. The growing season is from 230 to 260 days. Soils in the Grand Prairie are not good for growing trees. The vegetation mostly consists of tall grasses and scattered hardwood trees, especially along streams in the area.

- ▼ Most of the North Central Plains region is relatively flat and dry.
- **What are the main types of vegetation in this region?**





Cross Timbers

The Cross Timbers subregion surrounds the Grand Prairie. Because of this, it is divided into the Eastern Cross Timbers and the Western Cross Timbers. The main difference between the Cross Timbers and the Grand Prairie is that soils in the Cross Timbers are capable of growing trees such as post oaks, hickories, pecans, and elms. Rainfall in the Cross Timbers measures about 30 inches per year. The elevation ranges from 900 to 1,500 feet, and the growing season is about 240 days.

Rolling Plains

The Rolling Plains is the largest subregion of the North Central Plains. It begins west of the Cross Timbers and ends at the Caprock Escarpment. Rainfall in the Rolling Plains varies as you travel east to west. The eastern areas get around 30 inches per year, but the western areas usually get less than 20 inches. Elevations range from 900 feet in the east to over 2,000 feet in the west. The growing season is about 220 days.

The Rolling Plains subregion is largely a **steppe**. That is, the land is relatively flat and treeless. Vegetation generally consists of mixed short grasses along with mesquite and other brushy plants. Much of the Rolling Plains serves as grazing lands for large ranches.

Great Plains Region

The Great Plains region has three subregions. Two are large plateaus—the High Plains and the Edwards Plateau. The third subregion, the Llano Basin, is an area that is very different from any other part of Texas.

Llano Basin

The Llano Basin lies almost in the center of Texas. It forms an egg-shaped area south of the North Central Plains and east of the Balcones Escarpment. The Llano Basin is made up of granite, a very hard rock that is formed when molten rock cools slowly under the earth's surface. The pink granite that was used to build the Texas Capitol building in Austin came from the Llano Basin. The elevation of this subregion ranges between 1,000 and 1,800 feet above sea level. Precipitation averages about 30 inches per year, and the growing season lasts about 230 days. The vegetation is made up of mesquite, live oak and post oak trees, and short grasses. Pecan and oak trees often grow in low areas and along streams.

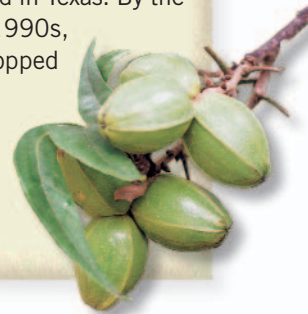
Edwards Plateau

The Edwards Plateau makes up the southern part of the Great Plains region. It lies north and west of the Balcones Escarpment. The plateau is primarily made of limestone, which has dissolved in spots to form a number



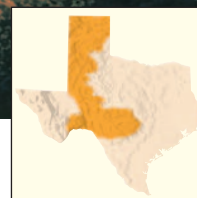
TEXAS PECANS

The pecan tree, native to more than 150 counties in Texas, has become a major source of income for the Lone Star State. It is the only nut grown in Texas for profit. In 1910 over 5 million pounds of pecans were produced in Texas. By the end of the 1990s, production topped 35 million pounds and brought in more than \$52 million.



steppe *a vast, treeless plain*

▼ The vast, treeless High Plains subregion of the Great Plains is broken by Palo Duro Canyon (at bottom of photo), which was formed by erosion. ● **What challenges might farmers in this region face?**





EDWARDS AQUIFER

The Edwards Aquifer extends under parts of 10 Texas counties and supplies water for communities from San Antonio to the Gulf Coast. In 1975 the San Antonio section of the aquifer was the first in the nation to be named a Sole-Source Aquifer by the Environmental Protection Agency. A Sole-Source Aquifer provides 50 percent or more of the drinking water for a particular area.

aquifer *an underground layer of porous rock, gravel, or sand containing water that may reach the surface through springs or wells*

- ▼ The Guadalupe Mountains in the Mountains and Basins Region rise high above the surrounding desert.
- What kind of climate would you expect in this region?



of caves and underwater streams. The Edwards **Aquifer** is a large bed of water-bearing rock that supplies water for San Antonio and many other communities below the Balcones Escarpment.

The Edwards Plateau is mainly between 1,000 and 3,000 feet above sea level. Precipitation ranges from about 18 to 30 inches per year. The growing season is estimated to last from 210 to 220 days each year.

High Plains

The High Plains, also known as the Llano Estacado, is one of the flattest places on earth. It was once covered with vast stretches of short grasses, like a steppe. Today, the High Plains is a major farming area.

The High Plains subregion extends west from the Rolling Plains to the Pecos River in New Mexico. The climate is dry, with precipitation amounting to less than 20 inches per year. The elevation of the High Plains ranges from 3,000 feet to over 4,000 feet above sea level. The growing season ranges from 220 days in the south to only about 180 days in the north along the Oklahoma border.

Mountains and Basins Region

This part of Texas is made up of tall mountains separated by large basins, or closed valleys. Most of the mountains receive enough rainfall to support forests of oak, piñon, and ponderosa pine trees. In contrast, the lower elevations and basins are desert country, with cactus, shrubs, short grasses, and other kinds of vegetation that can live a long time without water. Overall, this region receives little rain, ranging from a low of 8.8 inches per year near El Paso to almost 20 inches per year in higher areas. The growing season is usually between 220 and 245 days.

Elevations in the Mountains and Basins region vary widely. For instance, this region contains the highest point in Texas—Guadalupe Peak, which stands 8,751 feet tall. On the other hand, some parts of this region reach an elevation of only about 2,500 feet.

Summing Up Texas Regions

With so many plains, plateaus, and mountains, Texas boasts a very diverse landscape. In fact, learning to identify the many different regions in Texas can be difficult. How can you make Texas geography a little easier to understand? One way is by generalizing, or finding common characteristics among specific areas in Texas. Different parts of the state have different kinds of landforms. By making generalizations, we can simplify how we study these landforms.

One generalization you might make is that some areas have lower elevations and some have higher elevations. The Balcones Escarpment is very important because it divides the lowest parts of Texas from higher areas. The Coastal Plains areas east and south of the Balcones Escarpment



◀ At the Balcones Escarpment, the Blackland Prairie breaks sharply into the Hill Country. Austin, San Antonio, and other cities along Interstate 35 are located on or near the escarpment. • **Why is the Balcones Escarpment an important physical landmark?**

are all low and flat. West of the Balcones Escarpment the land is more varied. Also, the North Central Plains region is higher and hillier than the Coastal Plains. You can see the difference right away when you cross the Balcones Escarpment.

The Great Plains is largely an elevated plateau. It is even flatter than the Coastal Plains, but it contains deep canyons in some areas. Steep cliffs mark part of the plateau's edge. Only in the Llano Basin does the land become hilly.

The Mountains and Basins region is the only part of Texas where there are mountains. It is a large area of land with high mountain ranges separated by broad, flat-bottomed valleys called basins. This is the most distinctive landscape in Texas.

SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

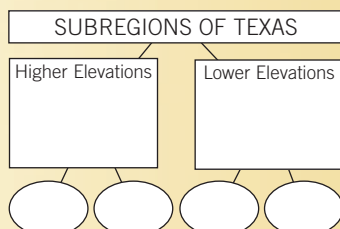
Terms & Names

Identify:

- subregion
- escarpment
- growing season
- steppe
- aquifer

Organizing Information

Use a diagram like the one shown to categorize each subregion as having a relatively high elevation or low elevation. In the ovals, list the common characteristics of all the subregions contained in each box. 🗺️



Critical Thinking

1. Which region of Texas is least like the other regions of the state? Why? 🗺️
2. Which of the regions or subregions of Texas might be best suited for farming? for ranching? for neither? Why? 🗺️

Interact with History 🗺️

Review your response to *Interact with History* in your Texas Notebook. How would you refine your instructions to each moviemaker? Explain in detail which area of Texas you would choose for each movie location and why.

ACTIVITY

Geography

Determine which region you live in. Then choose a different region, and create a chart to compare the regions. How are they similar? How are they different? 🗺️