

Summary: Geography of the Colonies

The Thirteen Colonies

The English colonies in North America were located between the Atlantic Ocean and the Appalachian Mountains. France had colonies to the north. Spain had colonies to the south. The thirteen colonies can be separated into three parts, or regions, by geography and climate: New England, the Middle Colonies, and the Southern Colonies.

The land in New England was shaped by glaciers. During the Ice Age, thick sheets of ice cut through the mountains. Glaciers pushed rocks and rich soil south. A thin layer of rocky dirt was left. Crops did not grow well in the rocky, sandy soil. Forests and hills made it hard to farm. In New England the summers were warm, but winters were long and cold. The growing season was only about five months long.

Colonists in New England used other natural resources to make a living. They cut down trees to make buildings and boats. They caught fish and whales for food and other products.

Glaciers pushed the soil from New England into the Middle Colonies. The soil was rich and deep. It was good for farming. The growing season was longer than in New England. There was more sun and lots of rain. Colonists used riverboats on long, wide rivers such as the Hudson and Delaware. They sent crops to sell in nearby towns. Colonists also hunted deer and beaver for food and fur.

The Southern Colonies had the best climate and land for farming. The climate was warm almost all year long. The soil was rich. The growing season lasted for seven or eight months. The many waterways along the southern coast formed the tidewater region. Ocean tides made rivers rise and fall as much as 150 miles inland. The fall line was along the Appalachian Mountain range. There, rivers flowed from higher lands to lower lands. The backcountry was the land in back of the area where most colonists settled. It was steep and covered with forests. Farms were small. Colonists hunted and fished for food.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

growing season *noun*, the time of year when it is warm enough for plants to grow

tidewater *noun*, the water in rivers and streams that rises and falls every day with the ocean's tides

fall line *noun*, the area in which rivers flowing from higher land to lower lands often form waterfalls

backcountry *noun*, the land "in back of" the area along the coast where most colonists settled

After You Read

REVIEW Why was farming difficult for New England colonists? Draw a box around the sentence that tells why crops did not grow well. Circle the sentence that tells why it was hard to farm. Underline the sentence that tells about the climate.

REVIEW Why was farming in the Middle and Southern colonies better than in New England? Draw a box around the sentences that describe the soils in these colonies. Underline the sentences that tell about the climates.