

Unit 6: Giants of the Forest

Narrator: In the forests of Sequoia National Park in the United States, stand the giants of the plant world—giant sequoia trees. They are one of the largest living things on Earth.

The world's largest giant sequoia, and the world's largest tree, is called General Sherman. It has stood in Sequoia National Park for over 2,000 years. It is over 80 meters tall. Its first branches only start growing 40 meters above the ground. In places, the length around its trunk is over 30 meters.

Why do these trees grow so big? One obvious reason is their long life. But that's not the whole story. The sequoia is also a very fast-growing tree. Given the right conditions, the sequoia is one of the fastest growing trees on earth. In their first ten years, they can grow up to 2 meters every year.

Another secret of the giant sequoia's size is its ability to survive fires. Forest fires can destroy other trees and plants, but a sequoia's thick bark doesn't burn, and it protects the tree from the fire's heat. Also, a forest fire burns away other plants, so the sequoia has more sunlight and space to spread its roots. So with each fire, and each year that passes, the sequoias not only survive, but grow taller and wider. Stretching their branches up and over the forest, until they become the giants they are today.