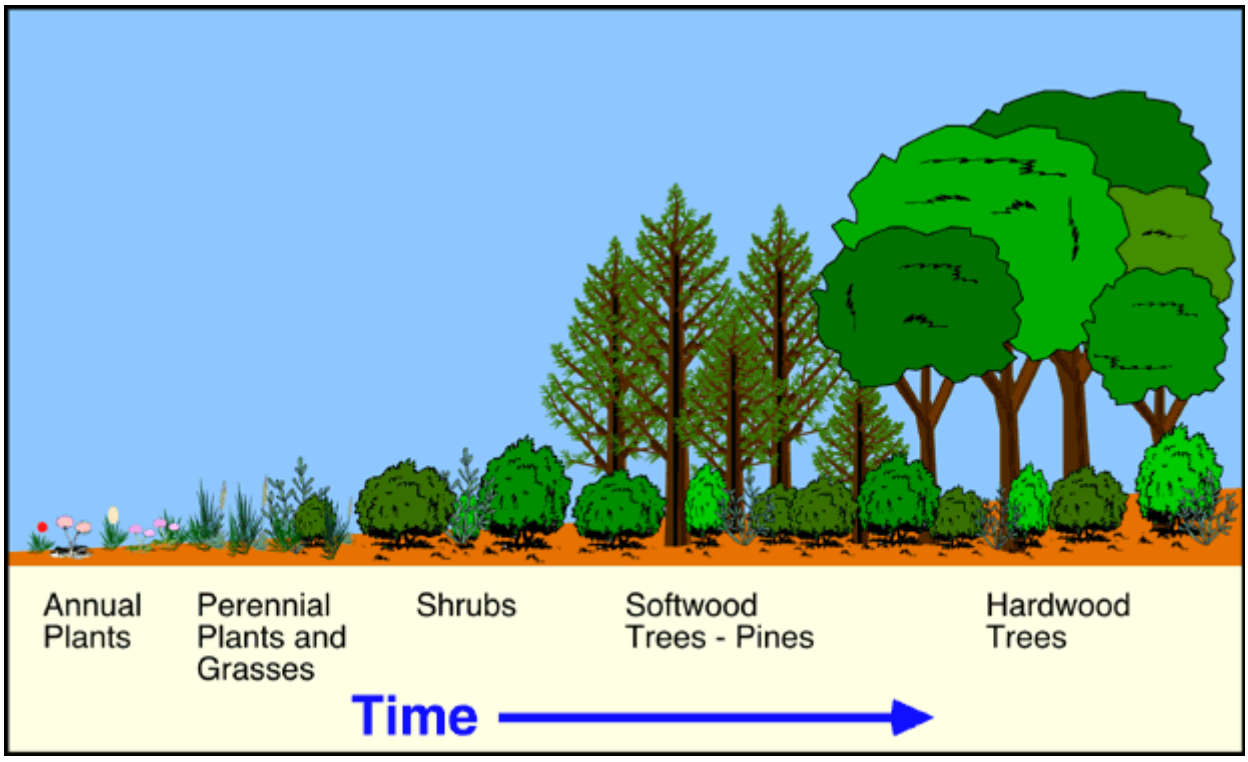
Succession

Succession is a cumulative change in the types of **plant species** that occupy a given area through time. It involves the processes of colonization, establishment, and extinction which act on the participating plant species.

Most successions contain a number of stages that can be recognized by the collection of species that dominate at that point in the succession. Succession begins when an area is made partially or completely devoid of vegetation because of a **disturbance**.

Some common mechanisms of disturbance are fires, wind storms, volcanic eruptions, logging, climate change, severe flooding, disease, and pest infestation.

Succession stops when species composition changes no longer occur with time, and this community is said to be a **climax community**.



Succession of plant species on abandoned fields in North Carolina. **Pioneer species** consist of a variety of annual plants. This successional stage is then followed by communities of perennials and grasses, shrubs, softwood trees and shrubs, and finally hardwood trees and shrubs. This succession takes about 120 years to go from the **pioneer** stage to the **climax** community.