

THE CARBON CYCLE

The carbon cycle is the natural way carbon moves through the Earth's atmosphere, living things, oceans, and geologic formations.

1 PHOTOSYNTHESIS

Plants absorb carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the atmosphere and use sunlight to convert it into organic matter.

2 RESPIRATION

Plants, animals, and microorganisms release carbon dioxide (CO_2) back into the atmosphere during respiration.

CARBON STORED IN PLANTS & SOIL

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3 DECOMPOSITION

When organisms die, decomposers break down the remains, returning carbon to the soil and atmosphere.

4 OCEAN ABSORPTION

Oceans absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Marine organisms use carbon to build shells and skeletons.

5 FOSSILIZATION

Over long periods, carbon can be buried and transformed into fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas.

