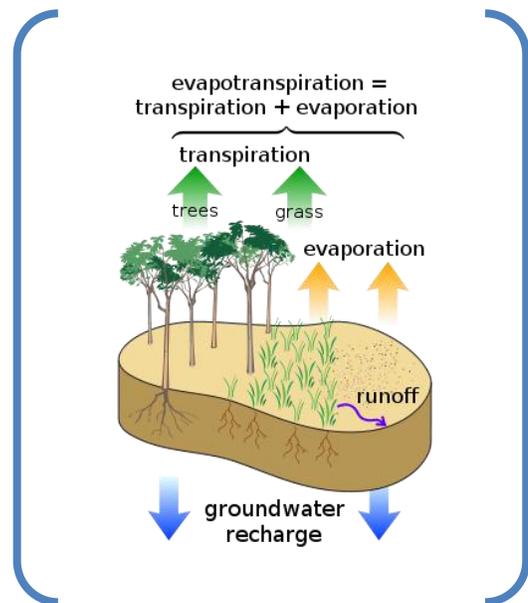


In simple words, evapotranspiration (ET) is a term used to describe the sum of evaporation and plant transpiration from the Earth's land surface to the atmosphere.ⁱ Evapotranspiration is defined as the water lost to the atmosphere from the ground surface, evaporation from the capillary fringe of the groundwater table, and the transpiration of groundwater by plants whose roots tap the capillary fringe of the groundwater table. The transpiration aspect of evapotranspiration is essentially evaporation of water from plant leaves. In some literature ET include evaporation from surface-water bodies, even the oceans.

Atmospheric factors affecting transpiration

The amount of water that plants transpire varies greatly geographically and over time. There are a number of factors that determine transpiration rates:

- **Temperature:** Transpiration rates go up as the temperature goes up, especially during the growing season, when the air is warmer due to stronger sunlight and warmer air masses. Higher temperatures cause the plant cells which control the openings (stoma) where water is released to the atmosphere to open, whereas colder temperatures cause the openings to close.
- **Relative humidity:** As the relative humidity of the air surrounding the plant rises the transpiration rate falls. It is easier for water to evaporate into dryer air than into more saturated air.
- **Wind and air movement:** Increased movement of the air around a plant will result in a higher transpiration rate. This is somewhat related to the relative humidity of the air, in that as water transpires from a leaf, the water saturates the air surrounding the leaf. If there is no wind, the air around the leaf may not move very much, raising the humidity of the air around the leaf. Wind will move the air around, with the result that the more saturated air close to the leaf is replaced by drier air.
- **Soil-moisture availability:** When moisture is lacking, plants can begin to senesce (premature ageing, which can result in leaf loss) and transpire less water.
- **Type of plant:** Plants transpire water at different rates. Some plants which grow in arid regions, such as cacti and succulents, conserve precious water by transpiring less water than other plants.



ⁱ Dingman, S.L., 1994. Physical Hydrology, vol. xiv. Prentice Hall, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, 575 pp.