Georgia’s largest geographical region is the Coastal Plain; it covers approximately 60 percent of the state, from the Atlantic Ocean to the [Fall Line](http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/topics/geography/article/geographic-regions-of-georgia/fall-line). In prehistoric times, this area of what is now Georgia was covered by ocean. Ocean waves slowly wore down hills and other land formations as they advanced inland. As time passed, countless numbers of seashells and other remains of ocean life sank to the ocean floor. Tightly packed, they eventually became beds of soft rock called limestone. Over time, rivers and streams deposited large amounts of soil, clay, and rock that had eroded from the hills and mountains to the north into the ocean. This eventually caused thousands of feet of sediment - or settled deposits - to cover the ocean floor.

When the ocean retreated, it left a vast area of limestone, clay, sand, and other sedimentary deposits - the region now known as the Coastal Plain. Nationally, the Coastal Plain extends along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from Massachusetts to Mexico, and up to 200 miles to the interior.

Along the eastern states - like Georgia - the Coastal Plain’s interior boundary is marked by the Fall Line. The Fall Line is actually a region several miles across. It marks the area reached by the prehistoric ocean’s shoreline. Land north of the line is higher in elevation than land to the south, causing rivers to pick up speed as they travel - or fall - through this zone. South of the Fall Line - in the Coastal Plain - the ground is soft and sandy. Rivers become wider, deeper, and move more slowly, making navigation by large boats possible. This was very important to Georgia history, as major settlements - later cities - grew along the Fall Line, like Augusta, Milledgeville, Macon, and Columbus.

Because of the effect of the prehistoric ocean, the Coastal Plain is relatively flat, with low relief and flat to gentle slopes. Rivers entering the Coastal Plain from the north flow slowly, develop wide banks, and tend to take a winding path. By the time they reach the coasts, many of these rivers - such as the Altamaha and Savannah - have become much wider than when they entered the Coastal Plain.

The land is low-lying Along Georgia’s coast. The soil typically consists of sand and clay for approximately 75 miles inland, and is not very fertile. The land tends to be poorly drained, and swampy areas are common (the Okefenokee Swamp is in the Coastal Plain). Early settlers discovered that little would grow here except pine trees and brush, which led to the name “Pine Barrens” for this region. Even today, this part of the state is poorly suited for agriculture. The land is used primarily for pasture and growing pine trees for timber, pulp, turpentine, and other products.

Further inland from the “Pine Barrens,” the Coastal Plain slowly slowly rises in elevation, but seldom does it rise more than 500 feet above sea level. The well-drained soil here consists of sand, clay, and other materials. This region is very fertile, and is famous for its peanuts, peaches, and pecans, and many other agricultural products.

Georgia’s second-largest geographical region is the Piedmont; while it is the second largest in size, it contains the highest population. This hilly region makes up approximately 30 percent of the state and lies between the mountainous regions of north Georgia and the Coastal Plain. Along the southern boundary, the Piedmont sits approximately 500 feet above sea level, but elevations can range up to 1700 feet at the southern edge of the Blue Ridge Mountains. This region consists primarily of rolling hills with many valleys. In some areas the hills are quite tall and almost appear to be mountains themselves.

Large areas of solid rock are found just beneath the earth’s surface in the Piedmont. This is called bedrock; consists of such stone as granite, gneiss, and marble. Piedmont bedrock is usually very hard, not like the sedimentary rock of the Coastal Plain. Because of this, it is normal to see large areas of exposed bedrock - called outcrops - where the soil has been washed away. Other evidence of bedrock can be seen in river beds, along highways, and on some hillsides.

Numerous streams and rivers cross the Piedmont, usually flowing from north to south. Because of the bedrock, streams tend to have shallow beds, with narrow banks. Exposed rocks create rapids - which makess navigation impossible for large boats.

A common feature of Piedmont soil is its distinctive red color-  the result of iron minerals found in granite and other rock. Erosion and weathering cause exposed rock in outcrops to break down into iron and other minerals. When Water is mixed in with the iron - it produces rusty red soil often called “Georgia red clay.”

Except for the areas with frequent outcrops and bedrock near the surface, Piedmont land generally is well suited for agriculture. Cotton, soybeans, and wheat are some of the more commons crops. Beef cattle and dairy cattle are raised in large numbers here, but the most important part of the agricultural economy is chicken broilers - Georgia is often referred to as the “Poultry Capital of the World.” Additionally, the land supports large forests, from which pine trees remain an important part of the timber industry.

Georgia’s most visually stunning geographical region is the Blue Ridge. The Blue Ridge Mountains are the highest in the Appalachian Highlands. This range reaches from northeast Georgia to southern Pennsylvania; it contains the highest elevations east of the Mississippi River. Georgia’s highest mountain - Brasstown Bald (4784 feet above sea level) - is located in the Blue Ridge region. Springer Mountain (3782 feet) marks the beginning (of the southern end) of the famous Appalachian Trail.

The height of the Blue Ridge Mountains cools warm, moist air currents off the Gulf of Mexico, producing abundant rainfall in most years. As a result, numerous rivers - such as the Chattahoochee and Savannah - begin here and flow south into the Coastal Plain before reaching their destinations.

The Blue Ridge accounts for less than 1 percent of Georgia’s best farmland. Because of the many mountains and valleys, farms tend to be small. Steep slopes and high rainfall also contribute to a highest erosion rate. The growing season varies from 210 days along the southern boundary with the Piedmont, to only 180 days in areas of the highest elevation. Apples (for which northeast Georgia is noted), corn, and other vegetables are suitable to the climate. Haywood timber, such as oak and hickory, grows well in the mountains. And because of the stunning scenery, tourism has become a large part of the region’s economy.

Located west of the Blue Ridge is the Ridge and Valley geographic region; nationally it stretches 1200 miles from northern New York to central Alabama - crossing a significant portion of northwest Georgia. The Ridge and Valley features long, parallel ridges overlooking wide, rolling valleys. From the valley floor, the ridges often appear to be mountains, but actually the highest is only approximately 700 feet tall. Elevations within this region range from 700 to 1600 feet above sea level.

The Ridge and Valley region sits among the Blue Ridge, Piedmont, and Plateau regions. Unlike the Piedmont and Blue Ridge, which consist of hard bedrock, the Ridge and Valley consists mainly of softer sedimentary rock. The ridges are composed of sandstone; the valley floors of limestone, shale, and other sedimentary deposits.

The sandstone ridges are generally covered with forests, while the valley floors are used for farming and pasture. The average growing season is 210 to 220 days, and a variety of crops can be grown here - corn, soybeans, wheat, and cotton. The soil is moderately suited for agriculture and makes up approximately 4 percent of Georgia’s prime farmland. Land not used for agriculture is often used for pasture and harvesting hardwood and pine timber.

Georgia’s smallest geographical region is the Appalachian Plateau, more commonly called simply the Plateau. A plateau is an area of flat or gently sloping land sitting over neighboring valleys or low-lying areas. Nationally, the Appalachian Plateau stretches from New York to Alabama in a series of plateaus along the western edge of the Appalachian Highlands. The southernmost of these - the Cumberland Plateau - includes approximately 300 square miles of the northwest corner of Georgia. Here you will find two flat-top features - Sand Mountain and the famous Lookout Mountain - separated by a deep, narrow valley. To the east of Lookout Mountain is Pigeon Mountain.

The Plateau region consists primarily of sedimentary rock - sandstone, shale, and limestone. Land here is generally used for hardwood forest and pasture, although a small amount of corn and soybeans are also grown. This area also marks the only known source of coal in Georgia.