Most Exciting Discovery
I discovered that red spruce, an important tree in northeastern United States forests, is at a disadvantage when compared to seedlings of other species. Red spruce seedlings grow best on moist soil, like soil created from decayed wood. But those soils are uncommon in managed forests because trees are removed before they die, fall down, and decay. Red spruce seedlings also grow slowly, and they are eaten by snowshoe hare. It is hard to be a red spruce seedling!

Important Scientist Characteristics:
I have a lot of perseverance. Perseverance enables me to continue with projects even if they are hard or take a long time. This is an important skill in science because there are always more questions to be answered.

Example of a simple research question I have tried to answer: How do light, moisture, and soil relate to the growth and survival of young trees of different species? Planting trees is uncommon in the forests of the northeastern United States. Most trees regenerate naturally. Foresters need to know which conditions are suitable for each tree species. With this knowledge, forests can be managed to create different microclimates, or small areas with different climates, for each tree species.

Technology or equipment used in research:
I use a camera with a fish-eye lens that can take hemispherical photos of the forest canopy. A hemispherical photo shows a full 180 degrees. Combined with computer programs, these photos show how much sunlight reaches young trees, called seedlings, on the forest floor.

Meet the Scientist!

Dr. Laura Kenefic
Silviculturist
Ph.D., University of Maine
USDA Forest Service scientist

As a silviculturist, I study ways to sustainably manage forests for desired products and outcomes.

http://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/people/lkenefic

http://www.naturalinquirer.org