



PLANET FINDING TIPS

No matter where you are on Earth, at some point during the year you will be able to see planets in your sky. Sometimes it can be hard to tell planets and stars apart. Which direction should you look? How high up? Follow this quick guide to find a planet!

1 Look for something bright.

The five brightest planets (Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, and Mercury) will be brighter than most of the stars around them. Venus will be the brightest of all. Not only is Venus our next-door neighbor, but its runaway greenhouse effect causes its atmosphere to reflect a lot of the Sun's light toward Earth. It may even look like a bright airplane near sunset or sunrise, but it isn't actually moving. Because of this, Venus is often called the morning or evening star.

2 Look for something that doesn't twinkle.

Stars are so far away that they look like tiny bright points of light to our eyes. Before reaching us, starlight first shines through Earth's atmosphere. The atmosphere has moving layers, which cause the light to bounce around as if you were looking above pavement on a hot day. That is why stars appear to dance around a little, or twinkle.

Planets in our solar system are much closer, so they look like tiny disks to our eyes instead of points. Their light comes through the same moving atmosphere, but the light bounces around within its own disk. Therefore, planets usually appear to be steady lights.



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3 Look for something that is in the same path in the sky as the Moon and Sun.

No matter what planet you're looking for, they will always appear near the same part of the sky – the same path that the Moon and Sun follow every day as the Earth rotates. This path in the sky is called the "ecliptic," or the plane of our solar system. All of the planets in the solar system lie along this plane. Though the height of the ecliptic will change depending on the time of year, just find where the Moon or Sun is in the sky – this is where you should look for planets.

Now you are ready to go and find a planet! The best time to find a planet is right after sunset or before sunrise. How can you tell which planet you are looking at? Consult a sky map, download a sky app, or ask a friend!