

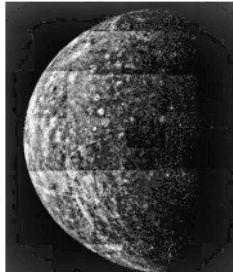
# ASTRONOMY BASICS - Learning about the Planets

Text below courtesy of <http://www.abc-learningfun4u.com>, except where referenced

There are 9 planets that make up our universe. An easy way to remember their names is by remembering the following: My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pickles. The first letters that you see underlined of each word stands for one of the nine planets which are listed below.

## Mercury

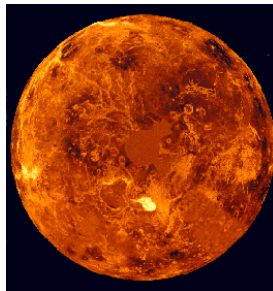
Mercury is the closest planet to the Sun. It has many craters due to being hit by lots of space debris over the years. Mercury has no atmosphere protecting it, so it is VERY hot on the side facing the sun and exceptionally COLD on the side facing away from the sun.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

## Venus

Venus is has very high temperatures and hundreds of miles per hour blowing winds. Its atmosphere is made of sulfuric acid.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

## Earth

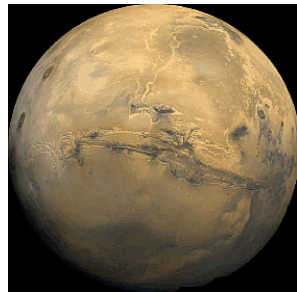
The planet which makes up our home. It offers various surface conditions. It is unique in this. No other planet in our solar system offers so many variations.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

## Mars

It is a reddish color planet. You can easily view Mars at certain times (when weather permits) through a common telescope. It has various mountains, canyons, and polar ice caps. From a distance it looks very much like Earth in ancient times.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

## Jupiter

Jupiter is the biggest planet in our solar system. With at least 61 moons (normally you would be able to see 1 - 4 with a telescope) and a great red spot. The spot is a storm which scientists here on Earth have been observing for years.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

## Saturn

Saturn is a beautiful addition to our universe. It has a system of rings around it. The rings look very simple through a telescope, but spacecraft pictures have shown that what looks like two rings through our telescopes are actually hundreds of individual ring systems. Saturn has many moons and looks like a miniature solar system.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

## Uranus

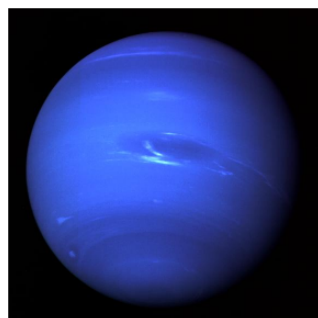
Uranus is a giant gas planet in the solar system. It is a mysterious blue-green color. It has provided very few clues as to what exists underneath the surface clouds. Uranus also has a very faint ring system that no one knew existed until the Voyager spacecraft visited the planet.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

## Neptune

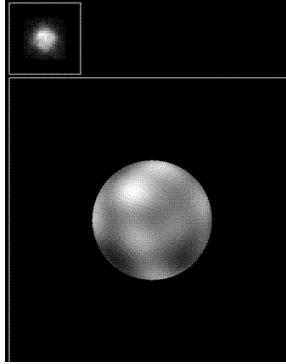
Voyager mission made its last stop at Neptune before leaving our solar system. We found out from this visitation that Neptune has hundreds of miles per hour winds. It also has a moon that features geysers of nitrogen gas that erupt, leaving dark indentations on the surface of the planet.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

## Pluto

Pluto, the smallest and most mysterious planet in our solar system. Pluto has one moon, Charon that is almost as big as the planet itself. Pluto is so far away that the Sun is just a dimly lit point of light that looks similar to any other star.



Pictures are courtesy of N.A.S.A

Below text taken from: "Ask an Astronomer" website.

The planet names are derived from Roman and Greek mythology, except for the name Earth which is Germanic and Old English in origin. The five planets easily visible with the unaided eye (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) have been observed for all human history as far as we can tell, and they were called different things by different cultures. The Romans named these planets according to their movements and appearance. For example, Venus, the planet that appears the brightest, was named after the Roman goddess of beauty, while the reddish Mars was named after the god of war. These Roman names were adopted by European languages and culture and became standard in science.

When Uranus and Neptune were discovered, there was not an established tradition in place so a few names were considered and used for each planet, until one name became standard. William Herschel, who discovered Uranus, wanted to name it "Georgium Sidus" after King George III. Other astronomers called it "Herschel" after the discoverer. The astronomer Johann Bode suggested that it would be more appropriate to use the mythological name Uranus, which would match with the five planets that were named in antiquity. Despite the suggestion, the name Uranus was not commonly used until 1850.

The existence of the planet Neptune was predicted by two astronomers (John Couch Adams and Urbain Jean Joseph Leverrier), and when it was discovered with telescopes there was a debate about who should be allowed to name it. Leverrier actually wanted to name it after himself. However, the name Neptune was proposed and became the standard used by scientists.

Pluto was discovered in 1930 by Clyde Tombaugh at Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona. According to the [Nine Planets Website](#), other names suggested for Pluto included

Lowell, Atlas, Artemis, Perseus, Vulcan, Tantalus, Idana, Cronus, Zymal and Minerva (suggested by the New York Times). The name Pluto was apparently suggested by Venetia

Burney, an 11-year-old from Oxford, England, and then recommended to astronomers by the observatory staff. Pluto won out, possibly because it's appropriate for the most distant world to be named after the god of the underworld.

Pluto's moon was named by its discoverer, James Christy, who found the moon in 1978 when studying photographic plates of Pluto. Apparently he wanted to name it after his wife, Charlene, but the nomenclature rules in astronomy wouldn't allow this. However, when he was looking for a different name he came across the Greek mythological figure Charon, which included the first part of his wife's name. Plus it was very appropriate since Charon was the ferryman who carried people to the underworld, which fits very well with the name of its planet, Pluto!

Although the Roman names for the planets are standard in science, other languages do have different names for planets.

Comments below courtesy of: <http://www.learningfun4u.com>

Astronomy is an excellent hobby, but bear in mind that pictures like you see in books and from N.A.S.A. are not common. The photographs have come from using high tech equipment and telescopes like N.A.S.A.'s HUBBLE SPACE telescope. You can see most of the planets and even take pictures of some with an average telescope, however results will vary widely and image color and quality will be nothing like the "professional taken images." One of the best ways to start in astronomy is to simply start out viewing the stars and moon with the naked eye. Get yourself an easy to follow star chart and learn to recognize stars, planets, and constellations, then after this, move on to purchasing a telescope or even a good set of binoculars.

Please join us soon for part II. - The Moon, Sun, and Stars.