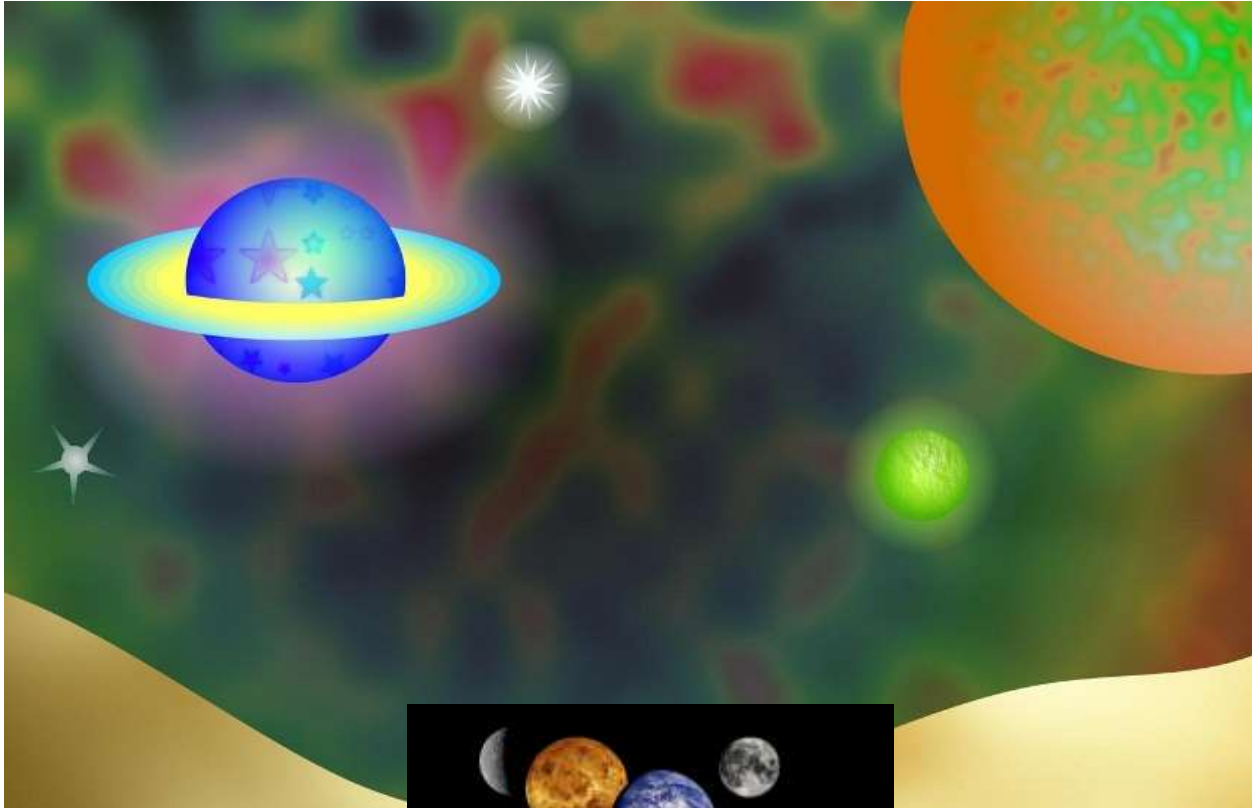


# SOLAR SYSTEM FACTS



## SOLAR SYSTEM FACTS



Our sun and the astronomical objects that orbit around it are known as the Solar System.

Ancient astronomers observed larger moving objects and named them planets, meaning 'wanderers'. Venus is named after the Roman goddess of love and beauty, Mars, the god of war, Mercury messenger of the gods.

Uranus, Neptune and Pluto were first observed after the invention of the telescope. Pluto was reassigned to dwarf planet status in 2006.

### **Terrestrial Planets**

Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars are inner planets, the planets that are closest to the sun. They are known as the terrestrial planets because they are made primarily of rock and metal.

### **Asteroid Belt**

A region known as the asteroid belt lies between Mars and Jupiter. Objects within the asteroid belt are also composed of rock and metal.

### **Giant Planets**

Jupiter and Saturn, outer planets, are known as the gas giants. Uranus and Neptune are known as the ice giants. Beyond Neptune, on the edge of the Kuiper belt, dwarf planet Pluto, has a solid icy surface

### **Kuiper Belt**

Like the asteroid belt, the Kuiper belt consists mainly of smaller astronomical bodies. Objects in the Kuiper belt are generally frozen.

## What is a Planet?

According to the definitions adopted by the International Astronomical Union, a planet:

- is in orbit around the Sun .
- has sufficient mass to assume a nearly round shape.
- is not a satellite.

has cleared the neighbourhood around its orbit.

A dwarf planet has the above characteristics but has *not* cleared the neighbourhood around its orbit.



## PLANETS - SIZE AND DISTANCE FROM THE SUN

	Radius (km)	Distance from Sun (km)
<b>Sun</b>	696,000	--
<b>Mercury</b>	2,440	58,000,000
<b>Venus</b>	6,050	108,000,000
<b>Earth</b>	6,378	150,000,000
<b>Mars</b>	3,393	228,000,000
<b>Jupiter</b>	71,100	779,000,000
<b>Saturn</b>	59,650	1,428,000,000
<b>Uranus</b>	23,550	2,869,000,000
<b>Neptune</b>	24,000	4,496,000,000

## Astronomical Units

Since the distances in space are so vast, we state them in Astronomical Units (AU). An AU is the distance from Earth to the Sun, about 150 million kilometres or 93 million miles.

The table at right lists the distance of each planet from the Sun in AU.

Planets, distance from Sun in Astronomical Units	
Planet	Distance from Sun in AU
<b>Mercury</b>	0.39
<b>Venus</b>	0.72
<b>Earth</b>	1.0
<b>Mars</b>	1.5
<b>Jupiter</b>	5.2
<b>Saturn</b>	9.5
<b>Uranus</b>	19.2
<b>Neptune</b>	30.1