



Earth is third planet from the sun

A planet is a celestial body that (a) is in orbit around the Sun, (b) has sufficient mass for its self-gravity to overcome rigid body forces so that it assumes a hydrostatic equilibrium (nearly round) shape, and (c) has cleared the neighbourhood around its orbit.

More than 30 times as far from the Sun as Earth, Neptune is the only planet in our solar system not visible to the naked eye. In 2011 Neptune completed its first 165-year orbit since its discovery in 1846.

It's a cloud-swaddled planet named for a love goddess, often called Earth's twin. But pull up a bit closer, and Venus turns hellish. Our nearest planetary neighbor, the second planet from the Sun, has a surface hot enough to melt lead.

With a radius of 715 miles (1,151 kilometers), Pluto is about 1/6 the width of Earth. If Earth was the size of a nickel, Pluto would be about as big as a popcorn kernel. From an average distance of 3.7 billion miles (5.9 billion kilometers), Pluto is 39 astronomical units away from the Sun.

Despite its proximity to the Sun, Mercury is not the hottest planet in our solar system - that title belongs to nearby Venus, thanks to its dense atmosphere. But Mercury is the fastest planet, zipping around the Sun every 88 Earth days.

The seventh planet from the Sun with the third largest diameter in our solar system, Uranus is very cold and windy. The ice giant is surrounded by 13 faint rings and 27 small moons as it rotates at a nearly 90-degree angle from the plane of its orbit.

When the solar system settled into its current layout about 4.5 billion years ago, Earth formed when gravity pulled swirling gas and dust in to become the third planet from the Sun. Like its fellow terrestrial planets, Earth has a central core, a rocky mantle, and a solid crust.

Jupiter is the fifth planet from our Sun and is, by far, the largest planet in the solar system - more than twice as massive as all the other planets combined. Jupiter's stripes and swirls are actually cold, windy clouds of ammonia and water, floating in an atmosphere of hydrogen and helium.

Saturn is the sixth planet from the Sun and the second-largest planet in our solar system. Like fellow gas giant Jupiter, Saturn is a massive ball made mostly of hydrogen and helium. Saturn is not the only planet to have rings, but none are as spectacular or as complex as Saturn's.

It's about 93 million miles (150 million kilometers) from Earth and it's our solar system's only star. Without the Sun's energy, life as we know it could not exist on our home planet. From our vantage point on Earth, the Sun may appear like an unchanging source of light and heat in the sky.



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