

The planet in our solar system

Dwarf planet Pluto is a member of a group of objects that orbit in a disc-like zone beyond the orbit of Neptune called the Kuiper Belt. This distant realm is populated with thousands of miniature icy worlds, which formed early in the history of our solar system about 4.5 billion years ago.

Dark, cold, and whipped by supersonic winds, ice giant Neptune is the eighth and most distant planet in our solar system. 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.

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.

The Sun is the largest object in our solar system. Its diameter is about 865,000 miles (1.4 million kilometers). Its gravity holds the solar system together, keeping everything from the biggest planets to the smallest bits of debris in orbit around it.

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.

While Earth is only the fifth largest planet in the solar system, it is the only world in our solar system with liquid water on the surface. Just slightly larger than nearby Venus, Earth is the biggest of the four planets closest to the Sun, all of which are made of rock and metal.

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.

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.

Our solar system consists of our star, the Sun, and everything bound to it by gravity - the planets Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune; dwarf planets such as Pluto; dozens of moons; and millions of asteroids, comets, and meteoroids.

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