

# Pluto

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## Small, Cold, Dark and Lonely Pluto

Pluto is one of the "dwarf planets". At an average distance of over three billion miles from the Sun, Pluto is very much off by itself. Pluto is so small that six moons of the solar system are larger than this small planet.

Pluto has three moons. Charon, which was discovered in 1978, and two other moons called Nix and Hydra, which were discovered in 2005.

### Pluto Facts

**Average Distance from Sun**

Approximately 3.6 billion miles

**Number of Moons**

Three

**Diameter**

1417 miles

**Length of Day**

Over 6 Earth days

**Length of Year**

248 Earth years

**Name**

Comes from the Roman god of the underworld.

## An Unknown Icy World

Pluto is so far away that even the mighty Hubble Space Telescope can't get us a very good picture. The image at right is the best image to date we have of this distant world. Very little is known about Pluto except that it is very, very cold and exceptionally dark. At this distance, the Sun is very much like all the rest of the stars you would see from its surface.

Pluto was discovered in 1930 by Clyde Tombaugh, who was working at the Percival Lowell observatory in Arizona at the time. There was a lot of discussion about what to name the new planet, but they eventually settled on Pluto, which had been suggested by a schoolgirl from England named Venetia Burney. The dwarf planet is named for the Roman god Pluto, which is the god of the underworld in Roman mythology.

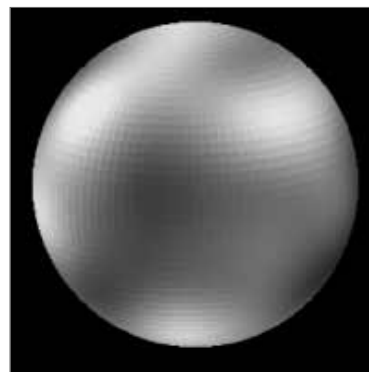


Image courtesy of: Hubble Space Telescope

## A Moon Almost as Big as the Planet

Tiny Pluto has a moon which a little over half the size of the planet itself. In all our solar system, no moon is this close in size to its parent planet. This may, or may not, mean that Charon itself is another asteroid that was captured as it flew by Pluto. There are many such examples of this in our solar system, but we just don't know enough about Pluto to say for sure.

All of the questions we have about this tiny world will likely remain unanswered until we can send a spacecraft to study it. Given the distance to the planet, its size and the expense of mounting such a mission, this will be a very big project.



Image courtesy of: Hubble Space Telescope

## Nix and Hydra

In May of 2005, scientists announced that Pluto has two additional moons called Nix and Hydra in addition to Charon.

The Hubble Space Telescope took several pictures of the new moons and they appear to be orbiting Pluto like a normal moon would. The moons are much further away from Pluto than Charon is, at distances of 30,000 miles and 40,000 miles.

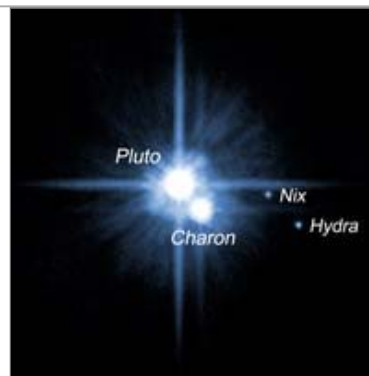


Image courtesy of: Hubble Space Telescope

#### [Find Out More About Pluto](#)

##### [Pluto Page at the Nine Planets Site](#)

The Pluto section of the Nine Planets site has more detail about this tiny world.

##### [New Horizons Mission to Pluto](#)

This mission is on its way to Pluto right now. Pluto is so far away that the spacecraft won't arrive at the tiny planet until the year 2015. Try to imagine what you will be doing in 2015.

Note: All links will open in a new browser window

