

All About Constellations

- ❖ A constellation is a grouping of stars that appears to form a pattern or picture.
- ❖ Constellation is an ancient word that comes from the Latin language.
- ❖ “Con” means “with” and “stella” means “star.” So a *constellation* is a picture made “with stars.”
- ❖ There are 88 “official” constellations. Each constellation is a collection of stars that are distributed three-dimensionally in space.
- ❖ Most of the constellations were named before recorded history. People of different cultures identified groupings of stars in the sky with gods, goddesses, animals, and objects of their stories.
- ❖ There are billions of stars, and only a fraction of them make up the shapes of our constellations — these are the stars that are easily seen with the unaided eye.
- ❖ Constellations are used to define pieces of the celestial sphere.
- ❖ All stars within a constellation boundary, whether part of the actual constellation or not, are assigned to that constellation.
- ❖ *All* the stars you see belong to one special group of stars — the stars in the Milky Way galaxy and fall within the boundaries of one of the 88 constellation regions.
- ❖ Our closest star is Proxima Centauri, 4.2 light years away, located in the constellation of Centaurus, the Centaur.
- ❖ The Big Dipper is not a constellation! It is *part* of Ursa Major, the Big Bear.
- ❖ The Big Dipper is an asterism, a recognized, but not official, grouping of stars.
- ❖ Some asterisms fall within a single constellation, others cross constellations.