

The Calabash Clash



*Credit: ESA/Hubble & NASA Acknowledgement: Judy Schmidt
Text courtesy of ESA/Hubble.*

To create this image, data were combined from several Hubble instruments including: the Wide Field and Planetary Camera 2, Wide Field Camera 3, and the Advanced Camera for Surveys.

- The Calabash Nebula, pictured here — which has the technical name OH 231.8+04.2 — is a spectacular example of the death of a low-mass star like the Sun. This image taken by the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope shows the star going through a rapid transformation from a red giant to a planetary nebula, during which it blows its outer layers of gas and dust out into the surrounding space. The recently ejected material is spat out in opposite directions with immense speed — the gas shown in yellow is moving close to a million kilometers an hour.
- Astronomers rarely capture a star in this phase of its evolution because it occurs within the blink of an eye — in astronomical terms. Over the next thousand years the nebula is expected to evolve into a fully fledged planetary nebula.
- The nebula is also known as the Rotten Egg Nebula because it contains a lot of sulfur, an element that, when combined with other elements, smells like a rotten egg — but luckily, it resides over 5000 light-years away in the constellation of Puppis.