

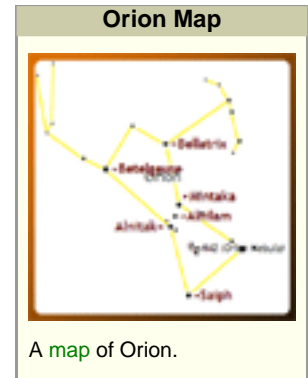
Astronomy for Kids - Orion

The Mighty Hunter

Orion is one of the largest constellations in the sky and is also one of the easiest to find. The giant figure also contains the Orion Nebula (M42), which has been the subject of many of the most famous astronomical images we have gotten back from the Hubble Space Telescope as well as other observatories around the world.

Orion is easy to find using a couple of methods. The easiest way to find Orion is to look for the three stars that make up his "belt". These three stars are Alnitak, Alnilam and Minatka. They form one of the most recognizable patterns in the sky. Another way to find Orion is to look for the four stars that make up his shoulders. Starting from the right shoulder and going clockwise, these stars are Betelgeuse, Bellatrix, Rigel and Saiph. Betelgeuse and Rigel are some of the brightest stars in the heavens, so they are easy to spot any time the constellation is visible. Whichever method you choose, Orion is very easy to find and will soon become a familiar landmark in the sky.

Like any successful hunter, Orion is accompanied in the sky by faithful dogs. In Orion's case, they are Canis Major and Canis Minor. Canis Major is the home of Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, and is easily visible during the winter months waiting at the right "foot" of the great hunter.



A map of Orion.

When Can I See Orion?

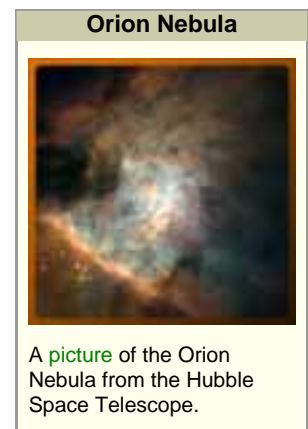
Orion is visible in the early morning hours beginning on the August through early December. Orion will start rising in the East before dawn the first part of August and, over the next several months, rise earlier and earlier until, by December, it rises around 9:00pm and sets in the West just before sunrise. This means that, beginning in December, Orion is visible during the evening hours. The great constellation is at its most impressive during the crisp cold evenings of winter when it is high and easy to spot in the night sky. Orion remains visible in the evening until around the first of May, when it drops out of our sight until the cycle starts over again the following August.

The easiest way to find Orion is to look for the three stars in his "belt". There isn't another group of three stars in the sky that are spaced so evenly and so easy to find. Once you have found his belt, the rest of the giant constellation is easy to spot.

The Orion Nebula

Orion is also home to one of the most beautiful objects in the night sky, the Orion Nebula. The third "star" down in Orion's sword is not a star at all, but the Orion nebula. If you get a pair of binoculars and look closely at this "star", you will see not one, but many stars. This is a sight that is easy for anyone to see, even without a telescope. If you have a telescope, you will be able to make out some of the giant cloud of gas that makes up this nebula.

This nebula is also one of the very few places in the sky where the Hubble Space Telescope has been able to spot disks of dust around some of the young stars. Stars with these disks may be forming their own solar systems.



A picture of the Orion Nebula from the Hubble Space Telescope.

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Find Out More About Orion

[Chris Dolan's Orion Page](#)

Chris Dolan's Orion page has lots of technical information about the stars that make up Orion

[Richard Dibon-Smith's Orion Page](#)

Richard Dibon-Smith's Orion page has an excellent account of the mythology behind this great constellation as well as an extensive listing of all the other interesting objects in and around it.

Astronomy for Kids - Map of Orion

Map of Orion

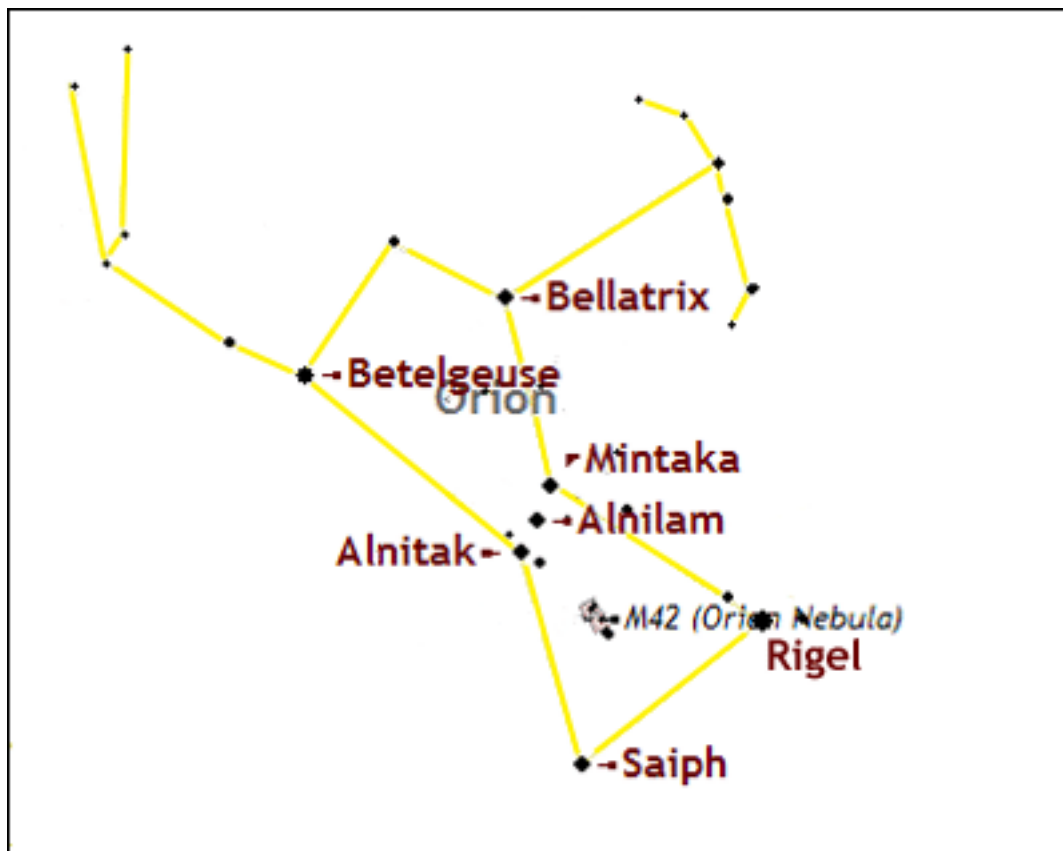


Chart prepared using Starry Night and Photoshop

Map of Orion

Astronomy for Kids - Hubble Image of the Orion Nebula

The Orion Nebula



Image courtesy of: Hubble Space Telescope

The Hubble Space Telescope took this beautiful image of the Orion Nebula