



STARTING ASTRONOMY

Astronomy is a rewarding hobby and it is very easy to get started. A starry sky on a dark clear night is a wonderful sight: your astronomy can begin with your unaided eyesight, and you can do even more with a pair of binoculars.

A useful start is to get hold of a simple guidebook to the night sky. You can then begin to find your way around the sky, starting with some of the more prominent constellations and brighter stars. Another helpful aid is a planisphere, which is a rotating plastic disc that shows you what constellations are visible in the night sky at any particular date and time.

Joining your local astronomical society will fire your enthusiasm. You will meet other amateur astronomers who are always keen to share their expertise, and there will be indoor meetings as well as outdoor gatherings for star gazing.

One of the monthly astronomical magazines will give you a variety of interesting articles, advertisements from suppliers of equipment, and a detailed guide on what to look for in the night sky in that particular month.

Computerised 'GoTo' telescopes make it easy to find celestial objects, but it is very rewarding to do this by eye. A popular method is known as 'star hopping', where you start at a familiar group of stars and 'hop' from star to star until you reach your target.

Binoculars

You can do quite a bit without any optical aid, but sooner or later you will probably start thinking of getting a telescope. However, far better than a small and cheap telescope would be an ordinary pair of binoculars – which you might already have.

A pair described as, say, 10x50 will have a magnification of 10 and an objective lens diameter of 50 mm. To ensure that the image will be bright enough, choose one with a lens/magnification ratio of at least 4. Binoculars with a magnification of above 10 can be difficult to hold steady and benefit from being attached to a tripod.

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Weblinks

Sky at Night guide to starting astronomy:

www.skyatnightmagazine.com/10easylessons

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