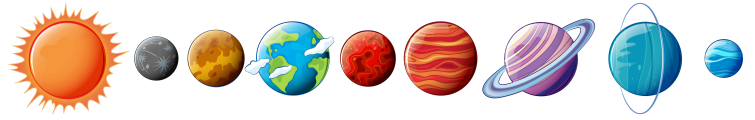


# The Solar System



The Solar System is our home in space. It is made up of the Sun, eight planets, and many smaller bodies such as moons, comets, and asteroids. The Sun is at the center. It is a huge ball of hot gases that gives light, heat, and energy to all the planets. Without the Sun, life on Earth would not exist.

Each planet moves around the Sun following its own path, called an orbit. The time a planet takes to complete one orbit is called a year. Our planet, the Earth, takes 365 days to go around the Sun. This movement, together with the tilt of the Earth's axis, gives us the four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

The planets closer to the Sun, like Mercury and Venus, are smaller and hotter. Mercury is the nearest planet to the Sun, while Venus is covered with thick clouds that trap heat. Earth is the third planet and the only one known to have liquid water and life. Mars comes next; it is dry and red because of the iron dust on its surface. Scientists believe that Mars once had water, and space missions continue to study it today.

After Mars comes the asteroid belt, a region filled with rocks and small objects. Beyond it, we find the gas giants: Jupiter and Saturn. Jupiter is the largest planet and has a big red storm that has lasted for centuries. Saturn is famous for its beautiful rings made of ice and rock.

Even farther away are Uranus and Neptune, called the ice giants. Uranus turns on its side, which makes its seasons very unusual, and Neptune is the farthest planet from the Sun. It is dark blue and has extremely strong winds.

Besides planets, our Solar System has more than 200 moons, and millions of comets and asteroids that travel through space. The Solar System is part of a much bigger galaxy called the Milky Way. Astronomers continue to explore and discover new facts about it, using telescopes and space probes. Together, all these worlds form a fascinating system that still surprises scientists every day.