

Solar System

Planets

Our solar system is the system of planets and other objects that orbit our star, the Sun (Figure 1). Our Sun, the star of our solar system, holds everything together by its gravity. There are eight planets in our solar system. There are asteroids and comets. There are moons and rings. The International Astronomical Union (IAU) defines a planet as a celestial body that (a) is in orbit around the Sun, (b) has sufficient mass for its self-gravity to overcome rigid body forces so that it has assumed a nearly spherical shape, and (c) has cleared the neighborhood around its orbit. The IAU definition of a planet is the subject of ongoing debate.

Our solar system formed about 4.6 billion years ago. It formed from a disk of gas and dust that surrounded the Sun. The disk was made of gas and dust. The gas was mostly hydrogen and helium. The dust was made of rocks and ice. The gas and dust were pulled together by gravity. As the gas and dust were pulled together, they got hotter and hotter. When they got hot enough, they started to burn. This is how the Sun was born. The Sun is a star. A star is a ball of gas that is hot enough to burn. The Sun is the only star in our solar system. It is the source of energy for all the planets. Without the Sun, the planets would be frozen and life would not exist.

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The first two planets outside the Sun are the gas giants, Jupiter and Saturn. They are called gas giants because they are made of gas. The other six planets are the rocky planets, Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars. They are called rocky planets because they are made of rock.