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solar system

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Introduction



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As the Sun ruishes through space at a speed of roughly 150 miles (240 kilometers) per second, it takes many smaller objects along with it. These include the planets and dwarf planets; their moons; and small bodies such as asteroids, connets, and meteoroids. All these objects orbit, or revolve around, the Sun. Toge ther, the Sun and all its smaller companions are known as the

solar system. The solar system itself orbits the clenter of the Milky Way galaxy, completing one revolution about every 225 million years.

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Earth is one of the larger bodies of the solar system. It is quite small, however, compared to the Sun or the planet politer, which are the largest members of the solar system. The solar system's smallest members are the microscopic, articles of dust and the even small ler atoms and molecules of gas of the interplanetary medium. This dust and gas is very um. It scattered in the huge expanses between the planets and other bodies in the solar system. (See also the solar system.

The Solar System in Space

Astronomers do not know exactly how far out the solar system extends. Earth orbits the Sun at an average distance of about 93 million miles (150 million k ilometers). Astronomers use this distance as a basic unit of length in describing the vast distances of the solar syst lem. One astronomical unit (AU) is defined as the average distance between Earth and the Sun.

There are eight planets in the solar system. Nep tune, the outermost planet, orbits the Sun from about 30 AU, or 2.8 billion miles (4.5 billion kilometers), away. Many comets have orbits that take them thousands of times farther out than Neptune. Most comets are thought to originate in the outermost parts of the solar system, the Kuiper belt and the much more distant Oort cloud. Each of these consists of countless small icy bodies that orbit the Sun. The farthest reaches of the Oort cloud extend perhaps to 100,000 AU, or some 9.3 trillion miles (15 trillion kilometers), from the Sun.

The solar system is, of course, not alone in space. The Sun is a star like countless others, and other stars also have planets circling them. The Sun is part of the Milky Way galaxy, a huge group of stars swirling around in a pinwheel shape. The galaxy contains hundreds of billions of stars. To measure the enormous distances in space, astronomers often use the light-year as a unit of leasth. One light year is again to the distance light travels in a page with the start of leasth.

roughly 150,000 light-years across. I the triple-star system named Alpha This is the double-click dictionary. Double-click any word to see its definition.

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