

Saturn Facts

Saturn is the most recognizable planet with a system of icy rings. It is the sixth planet from the Sun with the largest planetary rings in the Solar System. Saturn is the second-largest planet after Jupiter and has surpassed the number of Jupiter's moons.

Key Facts & Summary

- Since ancient times Saturn was known to humanity because of its brightness and closeness to Earth. It's not possible to give someone credit for the discovery of Saturn, however, the first telescopic observation was conducted by Galileo Galilei in 1610.
- The discovery of the rings was made by Christiaan Huygens in 1659.
- Saturn is named after the Roman god of harvest and time.
- Saturn is the second-largest planet of the Solar System, second only to Jupiter, having a radius of 58.232 km or 36.183 mi, about nine times that of Earth. It's diameter is 120.536 km/74.897 m, almost 9.5 times bigger than the diameter of Earth and a surface area about 83 times greater.
- The rings of Saturn are the most extensive of any other planet. They cannot be seen without an unaided eye. Generally, only 3 rings can be seen by regular telescopes, powerful telescopes can view 8 rings and when the spacecraft Cassini orbited Saturn, it counted well above 30 rings. It is important to understand that these rings are actually countless since they are comprised of millions of generally small rocks creating illusions of ring systems.
- The ring system of Saturn can extend up to 282.000 km/175.000 m from the planet.
- Saturn has the lowest density of all the planets at 687 kg/m³ which is lighter than water, so if placed on water, it would float.
- The planet is largely made up of gases such as hydrogen and helium. It's atmosphere is composed of ammonia – yellow, ammonia hydrosulphide – orange, and water – white – influence the planet's colourful appearance of a brownish-yellow.
- Saturn rotates quickly on its axis, completing a rotation or day in about 10.6 hours, but it's orbit around the Sun is slow, completing one trip around the Sun or a year, in about 29.5 Earth years.
- The temperature of Saturn's upper atmosphere is on average about -175C (-285F), quite cold for a gas giant, while below the clouds it gets considerably hotter.
- Saturn is the "king of the moons" in the Solar System, having a total of 82 confirmed and diverse satellites that range from a couple of meters to several hundred kilometres.
- Saturn has seven major satellites with one of them being even bigger than the planet Mercury
- Titan is the first discovered moon of Saturn. It was discovered in 1655 by astronomer Christiaan Huygens. It is the largest moon of Saturn and the second-biggest moon in the Solar System.

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