

URANUS

Uranus is the seventh planet in our Solar System. It is about 2.8 billion kilometers (1.8 billion miles) from the Sun. The average temperature on Uranus is about -214°C (-350°F) and its atmosphere is made up of hydrogen, helium, and methane.

How Big Is Uranus?

Uranus is the third-largest planet in the Solar System. The planet's diameter is 51,118 kilometers (31,744 mi) at its widest point. It's nearly Neptune's twin in size and is three times as large as Earth.

How Long Are a Day and Year on Uranus?

It takes Uranus about 84 Earth years to orbit the Sun. So on Uranus, there are about 84 Earth years (30,687 days) in one year. While its years are much longer than Earth's, its days are shorter. It takes Uranus about 17 Earth hours to spin around once.

Uranus is the only known planet that rotates on its side. Scientists think that a collision with an Earth-sized object early in the planet's history may have caused this unusual rotation. The planet has four seasons, like Earth, and each season lasts 20 years! However, because Uranus is so far from the Sun, the temperatures don't change much.

What Is Uranus Made Of?

Uranus is a gas giant, sometimes called an ice giant. It is made up of various ices, including water, methane, and ammonia. Methane gas gives the planet its blue-green color. Beneath the methane are the planet's clouds.

How Many Moons and Rings Does Uranus Have?

So far, scientists have found 27 moons orbiting Uranus. Most of the moons are very small. Miranda, the moon closest to Uranus, is made of rock and ice. Uranus's brightest moon is Ariel, and its largest moon is Titania.

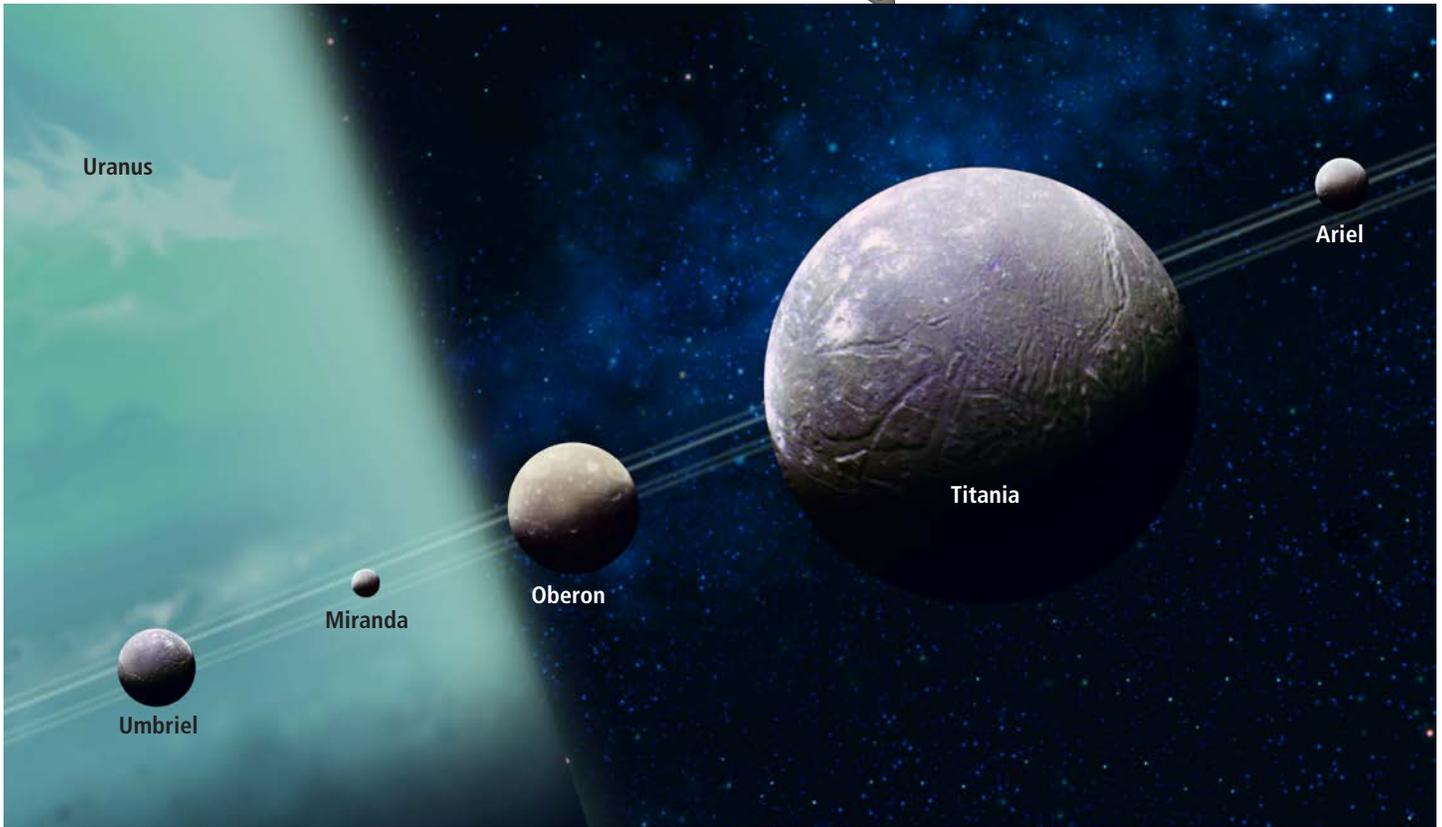
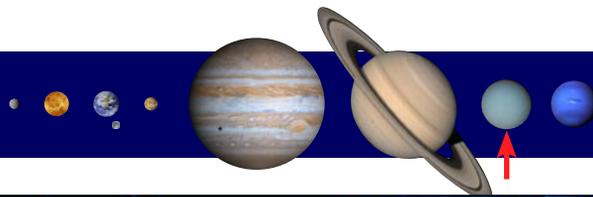
Uranus has two sets of rings, which are made up of dust and rocks from the moons. The inner system of nine rings, discovered in 1977, consists mostly of narrow, dark rings. In 2003, Hubble Space Telescope found an outer system of two more-distant rings, which are brightly colored.

In 1986, *Voyager 2* became the first spacecraft to fly by Uranus. It discovered ten additional moons and two new rings.

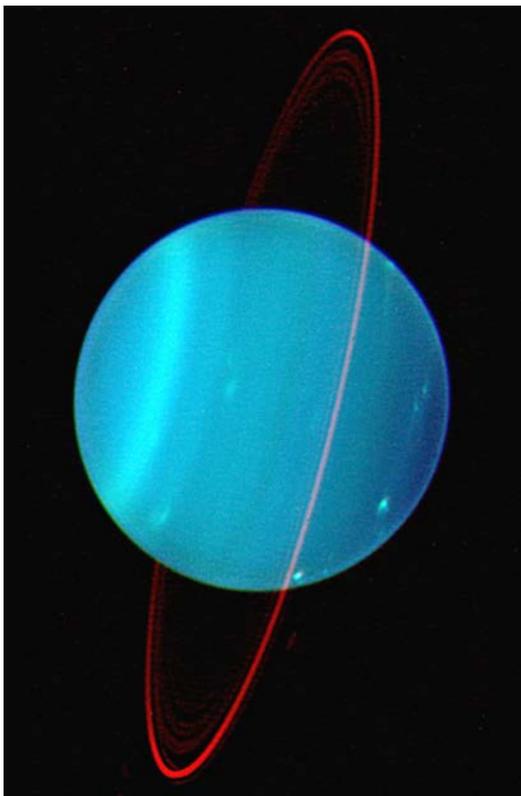
Do You Know?

- Uranus was named after the Greek god of the sky.
- On March 13, 1781, an English astronomer named William Herschel discovered the planet but at first thought it was a comet. Uranus was the first planet found with the aid of a telescope.
- Many of Uranus's moons have been named after characters from the works of William Shakespeare.

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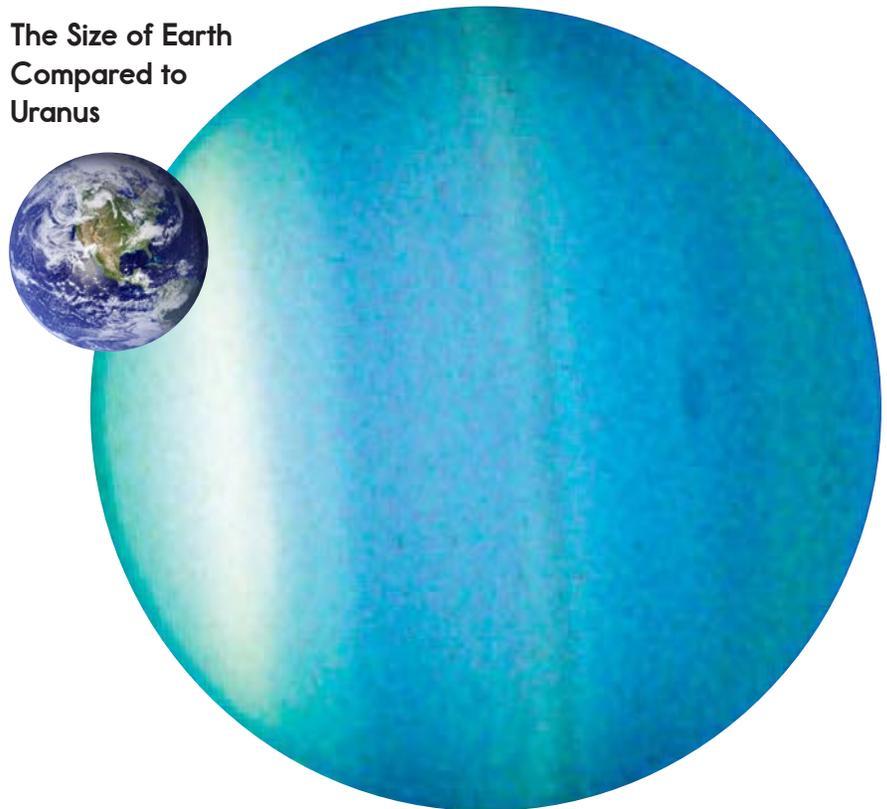


This computer generated image shows the relative sizes of Uranus's five largest moons.



Using a telescope and special filters, astronomers were able to take this image of Uranus's rings.

The Size of Earth Compared to Uranus



The Hubble Space Telescope took this photo of Uranus. The almost vertical bands show the planet's rotation. A dark spot on the right side is evidence of a huge storm.