

Solar System Exploration

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Mars:

The red planet Mars has inspired wild flights of imagination over the centuries, as well as intense scientific interest. Whether fancied to be the source of hostile invaders of Earth, the home of a dying civilization, or a rough-and-tumble mining colony of the future, Mars provides fertile ground for science fiction writers, based on seeds planted by centuries of scientific observations.

We know that Mars is a small rocky body once thought to be very Earth-like. Like the other "terrestrial" planets - [Mercury](#), [Venus](#), and [Earth](#) - its surface has been changed by volcanism, impacts from other bodies, movements of its crust, and atmospheric effects such as dust storms. It has polar ice caps that grow and recede with the change of seasons; areas of layered soils near the Martian poles suggest that the planet's climate has changed more than once, perhaps caused by a regular change in the planet's orbit. Martian tectonism - the formation and change of a planet's crust - differs from Earth's. Where Earth tectonics involve sliding plates that grind against each other or spread apart in the seafloors, Martian tectonics seem to be vertical, with hot lava pushing upwards through the crust to the surface. Periodically, great dust storms engulf the entire planet. The effects of these storms are dramatic, including giant dunes, wind streaks, and wind-carved features.



NASA's hubble space telescope snapped this stunning view of Mars in August 2003.

[Read More About Mars](#)

Just the Facts

Metric | English | Scientific Notation

Distance from the Sun: 227,936,640 km

Equatorial Radius: 3,397 km

Resources

- Missions to Mars
 - Center for Mars Exploration (NASA Ames Research Center)
 - Mars Exploration (Jet Propulsion Laboratory)

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Volume: 163,140,00,000 km³

Mass: 641,850,000,000,000,000,000 kg

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