



## **Star Naming**

### **How can I buy a star?**

You can't. No one has ownership of the stars to sell one to you.

### **Can I name a star after someone?**

Sure! Anybody can name anything. There's no reason to think anyone else will know or care, but you can name anything you want. Knock yourself out.

### **Can you tell me the names of companies that will name a star whatever I want for a fee?**

No. We don't know their names. We have no relationship of any kind with any star naming company. In fact we prefer to stay as far away from that business as humanly possible. Their star naming activities are completely unofficial money-making enterprises and have no standing among scientists. Remember that since there are several different companies, it is possible (although unlikely) that other companies could assign someone else's name to "your" star.

Bear in mind that you can do the same thing for free rather than paying a company to do it. Walk outside, pick out a nice star that you know you can find again, name it anything you want, and then use a computer at home or at a library to print out a document proclaiming that name. That will be just as unofficial as anything the star naming companies can do.

Commercial star naming is similar to someone offering to take your money and name a street in New York City after whomever you want. New Yorkers probably would never know about it, and if they did, they would ignore it. Mapmakers would not rush to update their maps. No one would start calling Broadway "Uncle Fred Road," or whatever you had named it. If you told people about the name change as if you thought it was serious, they'd look at you like you were crazy. Thinking you've actually named a star is just as goofy.

### **Can you show us the star we just named?**

No. We have no relationship of any kind with any star naming company. We do not offer that service no matter what the star naming company's advertising might imply.

### **OK, then how can I find it myself?**

You'll need a good telescope, not a toy, and you'll need to know how to use it.

With few exceptions, star naming companies will name a very faint star that cannot be seen without a good-sized telescope and fairly dark sky conditions far from cities. Finding it requires knowing exactly where in the sky that star is, when it is above your horizon, and how dim it will look. Some companies do not give positions accurately enough to do this, and you may have to find the star's scientific designation to look up the position. You have to be able to point the telescope at the star's precise position, and even then you may not be able to figure out which star is the right one out of all the stars in the telescope's field of view. Good luck.

### **Don't stars have names? How do you tell them apart? Why wouldn't mine be as good as any of the others?**

Although a few hundred stars have traditional names (mostly dating back hundreds or even thousands of years ) and a few have modern nicknames, most do not. They are instead identified by a variety of different catalog designations. The catalogs are created by astronomers for astronomers, and go into common use because they advance the science in some way. Some are useful simply because they catalog the positions of increasingly large numbers of stars. Others are important because they catalog by both position and measured distance, or because they catalog special types of stars such as variable stars or binary stars (or other celestial objects such as nebulae, star clusters, or galaxies). Importantly, when objects go into these catalogs and when the catalogs are used, *no money changes hands*. The catalogs and books created by star namers list randomly assigned names and are useless to astronomers. Astronomers don't use them and will not know the name you have assigned.

By international agreement among astronomers, standards for star designations are set by the International Astronomical Union (IAU). Using the IAU as a clearing house eliminates the chaos and confusion that would result if people just named stars and other celestial objects whatever they wanted. For information about actual star designations, see this [IAU public statement](#).

For more information about commercial star naming, see the [International Planetarium Society's position statement](#) or the [IAU's position statement](#). The American Astronomical Society has information at <https://aas.org/faq/can-i-buy-star> and the Royal Greenwich Observatory has some at <http://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/naming-stars>.