



Pluto's known moons

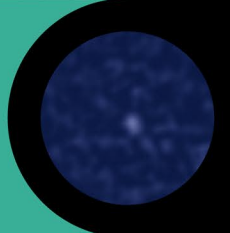


Planetary scientists believe Pluto's moons formed when Pluto collided with another planet-sized body early in the history of the solar system's formation. That great collision spewed material that eventually coalesced into the five known satellites observed to orbit Pluto in its equatorial plane. NASA's New Horizons mission will answer many unknowns about these distant moons. The spacecraft might find even more moons orbiting Pluto.

Styx

Discovered: 2012, Mark Showalter and a team of collaborators
 Named after the mythological river that separates the world of the living from that of the dead

Astronomers discovered Styx in 2012 during an HST survey for potential hazards around Pluto. It's the smallest known moon of Pluto.



Stats
 Size: 4–17 miles (8–28 kilometers) diameter
 Distance from Pluto: 26,000 miles (42,000 km)
 Orbit period around Pluto: 20 Earth days

Charon

Discovered: 1978, James Christy
 Named after the mythological ferryman who carries dead souls across the river Styx

At half the size of Pluto, Charon is the largest of Pluto's moons and the largest known satellite relative to its planet. Pluto-Charon is the solar system's only known "double planet." The same surfaces of Charon and Pluto always face each other, a phenomenon called mutual tidal lock.



Stats
 Size: 749–753 miles (1,207–1,212 km) diameter
 Distance from Pluto's center: 12,200 miles (19,600 km)
 Orbit period around Pluto: 6.4 Earth days

Nix

Discovered: 2005, Hal Weaver, Alan Stern, and a team of collaborators
 Named after the goddess of darkness and night; she is also Charon's mother in mythology

Nix and Hydra were discovered in the same year using NASA's Hubble Space Telescope (HST). Nix is the inner of these two moons, orbiting between Styx and Kerberos. Both Nix and Hydra are roughly 5,000 times fainter than Pluto.




Stats
 Size: 28–86 miles (46–140 km) diameter
 Distance from Pluto: 30,300 miles (48,700 km)
 Orbit period around Pluto: 25 Earth days

Hydra

Discovered: 2005, Hal Weaver, Alan Stern, and a team of collaborators
 Named after the nine-headed serpent in Greek and Roman mythology

Hydra is the outermost known moon of Pluto and second brightest after Charon. It was discovered along with Nix in 2005.




Stats
 Size: 36–106 miles (59–172 km) diameter
 Distance from Pluto: 40,300 miles (64,800 km)
 Orbit period around Pluto: 38 Earth days

Kerberos

Discovered: 2011, Mark Showalter and a team of collaborators
 Named after the three-headed dog that guards the underworld

Kerberos is located between the orbits of Nix and Hydra. Very little is known about it except that it is much fainter than either Nix or Hydra.



Stats
 Size: 8–27 miles (14–44 km) diameter
 Distance from Pluto: 37,000 miles (59,000 km)
 Orbit period around Pluto: 32 Earth days

