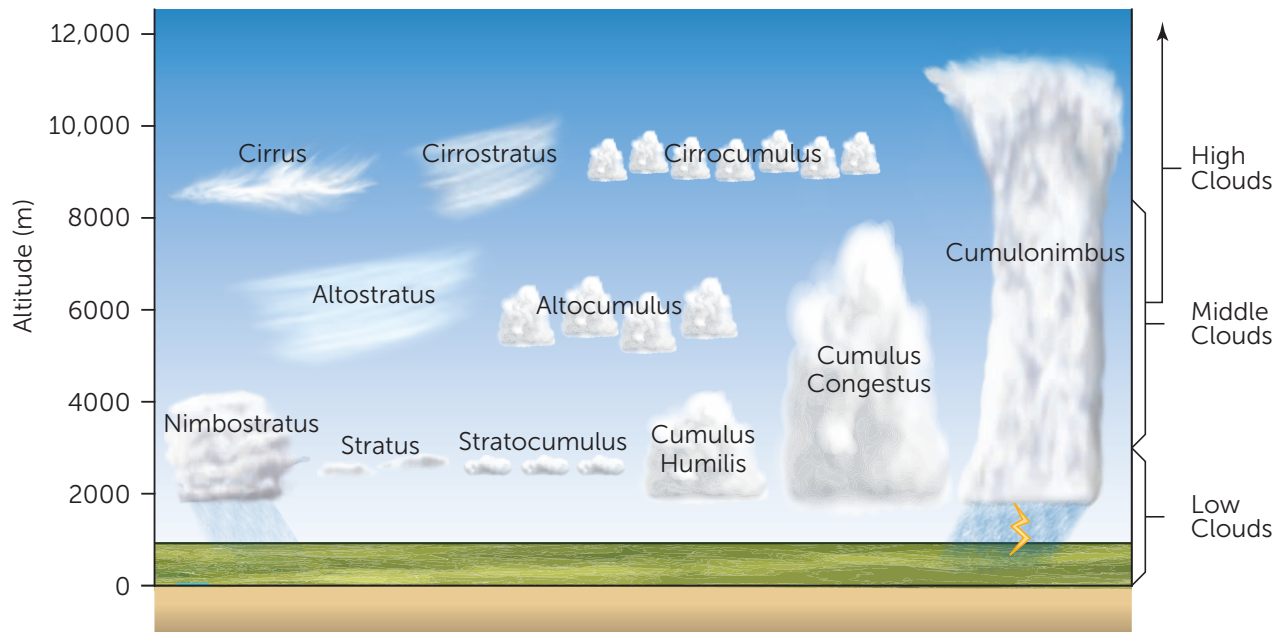


Cloud Chart



CIRRUS CLOUDS appear as fibrous streaks scattered across the sky. Because they form high in the troposphere, where it is both dry and cold, cirrus are relatively thin clouds, composed of ice crystals.

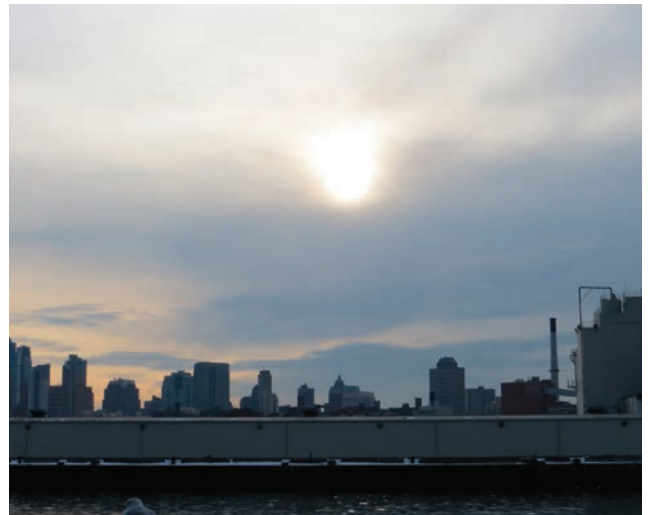


CIRROCUMULUS CLOUDS are high-altitude clouds made of ice crystals. They are layer clouds that have been destabilized to produce tiny individual clumps of cloud that are usually arranged in a regular pattern, between which blue sky can be seen.

Alexey Romanov/Thinkstock



CIRROSTRATUS CLOUDS are high ice-crystal clouds that form a veil across the sky. This layer of cloud is often so thin that direct sunlight can cast shadows on the ground below it. The ice crystals in cirrostratus clouds can produce a halo around the sun or moon.



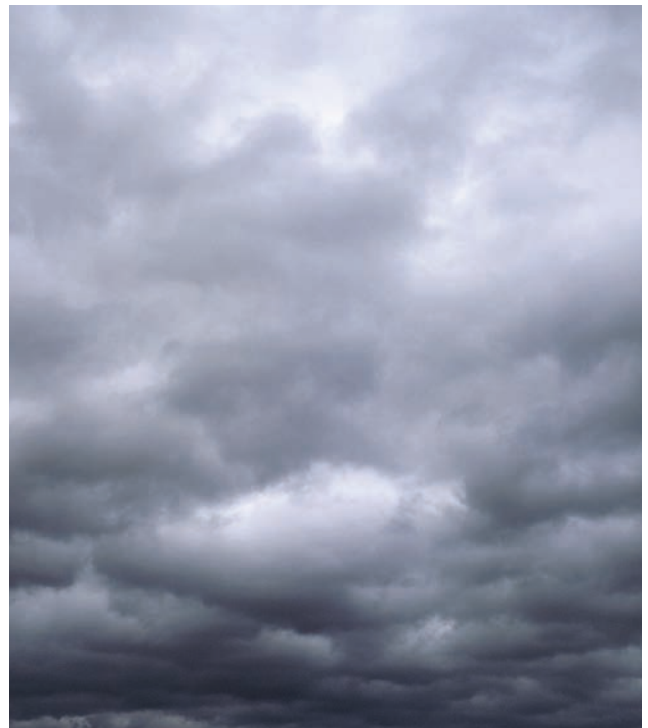
bellasabel/iStockphoto

ALTOSTRATUS CLOUDS are middle-height clouds that form a featureless sheet across the sky. Altostratus cloud is thicker than cirrostratus cloud, so the sun appears as though it is shining through frosted glass, and its light becomes too diffuse to cast shadows on the ground.

DWalker4/iStockphoto



ALTOCUMULUS CLOUDS are middle-height clouds that form a layer that covers most of the sky. Like cirrocumulus clouds, they are produced when a cloud layer is destabilized. Unlike cirrocumulus, the individual clumps of altocumulus cloud shadow each other and appear larger because they are closer to the ground.



Bildarchiv Okapia/Science Source

STRATOCUMULUS CLOUDS are the most common of all cloud types. They are low clouds that have characteristics of both stratiform and cumuliform clouds, being both layered and heaped in form. The individual cloud mounds are larger than they are in altocumulus clouds, and they show more tonal variation than is apparent in stratus clouds. These clouds can produce light precipitation.

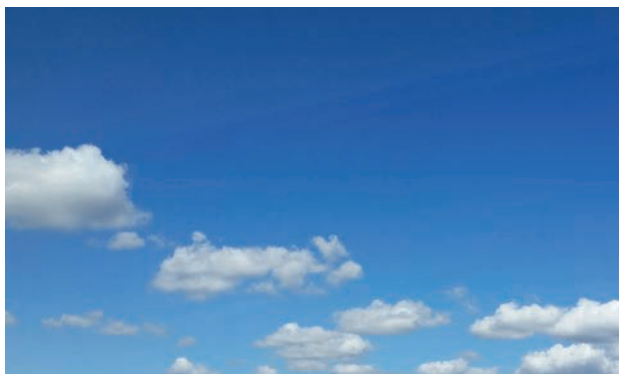


STRATUS CLOUDS are the lowest of the layered clouds; this often makes them appear fog-like. The edges of these clouds are diffuse and they can produce drizzle.

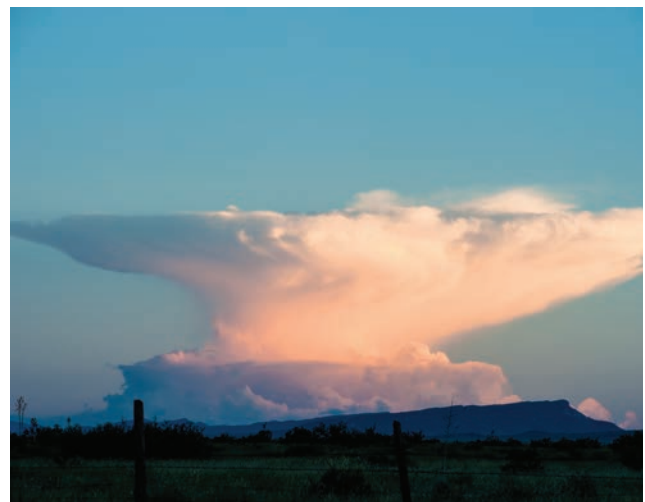


NOAA

NIMBOSTRATUS CLOUDS are classified as middle-height clouds; however, they can extend through more than one level. They produce steady precipitation over wide areas and are thick enough to block out the sun and the moon.



CUMULUS HUMILIS CLOUDS appear as individual heaps scattered randomly across the sky. They are fair-weather clouds that often dot the sky on warm summer afternoons. The flat bases of cumulus humilis clouds occur at low altitudes, and they are usually slightly wider than they are tall.



MRRTPilot/Stockphoto

CUMULONIMBUS CLOUDS are the tallest of clouds, extending from low altitudes to the tropopause and beyond. These clouds develop from growing cumulus congestus clouds and produce thunder and lightning, and often hail, as well as heavy rain. They can be distinguished from cumulus congestus clouds by their anvil tops, which resemble cirriform clouds and form when the top of the cloud reaches the stable air just above the tropopause.

ryanmatthewsmith/Stockphoto



CUMULUS CONGESTUS CLOUDS develop from growing cumulus humilis clouds; unlike cumulus humilis clouds, they can produce heavy precipitation of short duration.

gontabunta/Thinkstock



MAMMATUS CLOUDS are smooth, rounded, “udder-like” blobs that hang from the undersides of other clouds, particularly the anvils of cumulonimbus. Mammatus clouds form when pockets of air sink through a very unstable cloud layer, so that condensation occurs just below the cloud.

plipenkoD/Thinkstock



LENTICULAR CLOUDS get their name because they are shaped like lenses; they have often been mistaken for UFOs. These clouds form as air rises in the crests of waves that result when air flows over mountains.

kuzina1964/Thinkstock



COMBINATIONS OF CLOUD TYPES often appear in the skies. This example shows both cumulus clouds and cirrus clouds. Cumulus clouds often form in warm air rising from the surface, while cirrus clouds form in the upper troposphere. Note the contrast between the distinct edges and thickness of the lower clouds that are composed of water droplets and the ragged edges and thinness of the upper clouds that are composed of ice crystals.