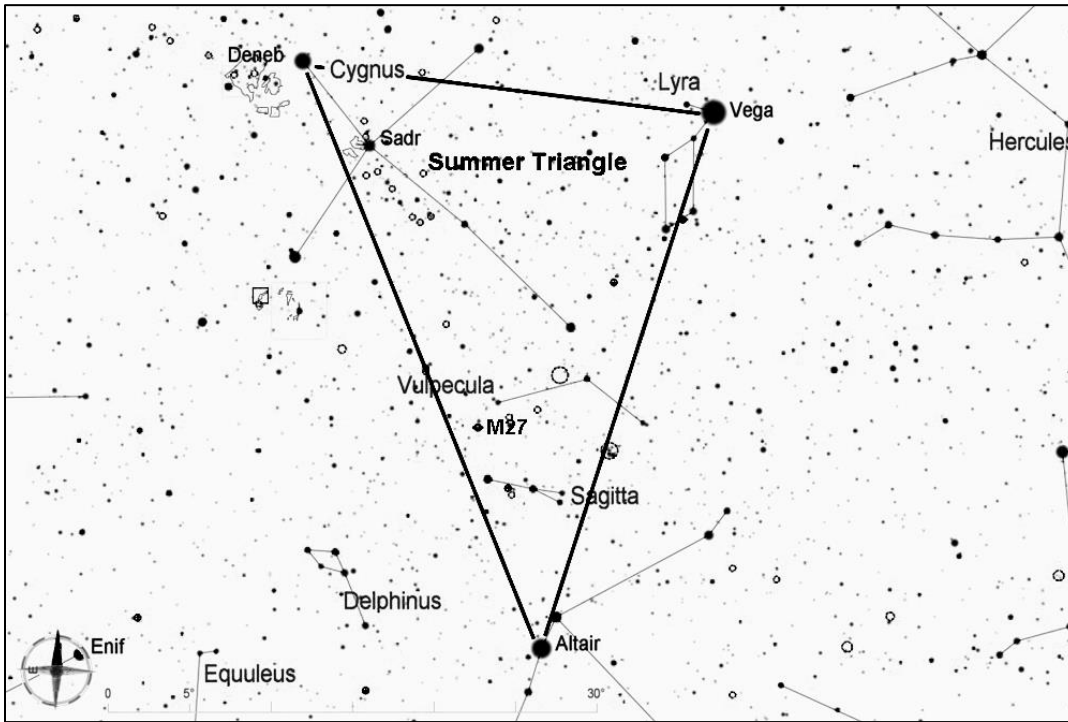


Messier 39, Open Cluster in Cygnus

Messier 39 is a large, coarse open cluster of about 30 bright stars in a triangular shape, about 1000 light years away. It occupies an area of sky about the size of the full Moon, and it can be seen with the naked eye as a dim hazy patch about 10 degrees northeast of Deneb, the brightest star in Cygnus. Through binoculars, a dozen or so stars can be seen.



Start by finding the Summer Triangle, which consists of the three of the brightest stars in the sky--Vega, Deneb, and Altair. The Summer Triangle is high overhead throughout the summer, and it sinks lower in the west as fall progresses.

For this star hop, start from Deneb, the first-magnitude star that forms the tail of Cygnus, the swan (or if you visualize the brightest stars of Cygnus as a cross shape, Deneb is at the top of the cross).

From Deneb, look about 5 degrees to the northeast for a pair of dim stars (about magnitude 4-5) that are circled in the chart below. Continue in roughly the same direction for another 5 degrees and you will reach the location of M39. It is large and bright enough to be easily visible in binoculars or a finderscope. Because of its large size, use a low-power eyepiece when viewing M39 through a telescope.

