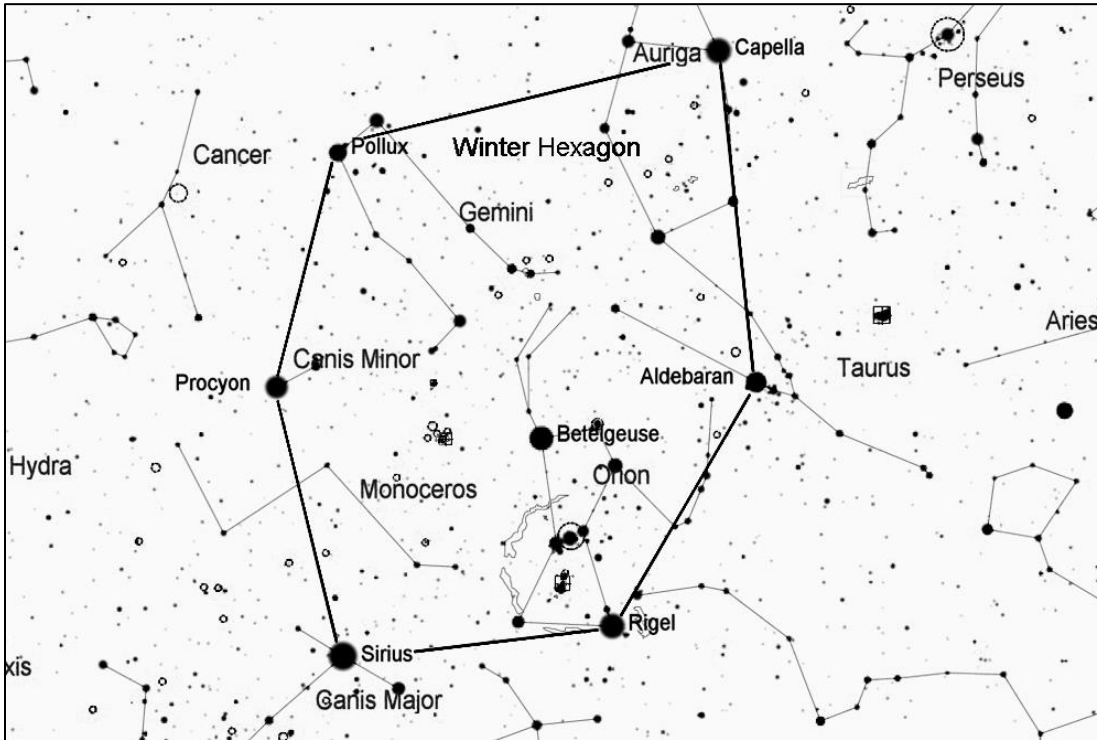


## Messier 41, Open Cluster in Canis Major

At magnitude 4.5, Messier 41 is not too hard to spot with the naked eye as a hazy spot below brilliant Sirius. Through binoculars or a telescope, M41 is one of the more impressive open clusters in the winter sky. See if you can detect the color variations among its stars. This cluster is about 25 light years across and about 2300 light years away.



Find the Winter Hexagon, which is composed of six of the brightest stars in the sky--Sirius, Procyon, Pollux, Capella, Aldebaran, and Rigel. On mid-winter evenings, these stars form a large oval stretching from low in the south to nearly overhead. As spring begins, the Winter Hexagon sinks toward the west. The constellation Orion and its bright red star Betelgeuse are inside the Hexagon.

For this star hop, find Sirius, the brightest star in the sky.

Sirius is known as the "dog star," and it forms the neck region of the constellation Canis Major, the big dog. From Sirius, look toward a point 4 degrees to the south, as shown below. Messier 41 may be visible to the naked eye, and it will be easy to spot in binoculars or a finderscope.

