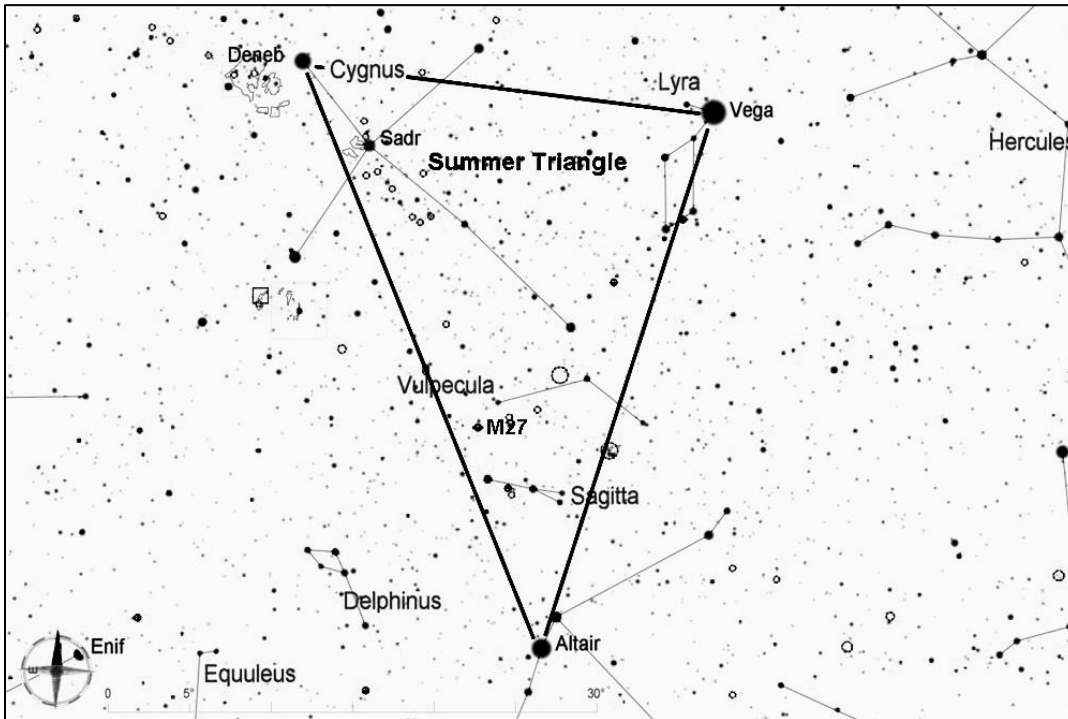


## Messier 57, the Ring Nebula

The iconic smoke-ring shape of M57 can be seen with even small telescopes if you use high magnification. Photographs show a range of colors, but through the eyepiece the nebula looks gray. As with all planetary nebulae, this expanding ball of gas has been emitted from the star in its center. The size and distance of M57 are not precisely known, but it may be about 0.9 light years in diameter and about 2300 light years away.



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 brilliant blue-white Vega (magnitude 0), the brightest of the three stars of the Summer Triangle.

The constellation Lyra has a distinctive shape consisting of a small triangle (including Vega) connected to a parallelogram. Look for the two southern stars of the parallelogram, those furthest from Vega. The Ring Nebula is about 2/3 of the way from  $\gamma$  (Gamma) to  $\beta$  (Beta) Lyrae. It may be too dim to see through a finderscope, but point your scope between those two stars and look through the telescope with a low-power eyepiece for the oval ring. Then use higher magnification for a better view.

