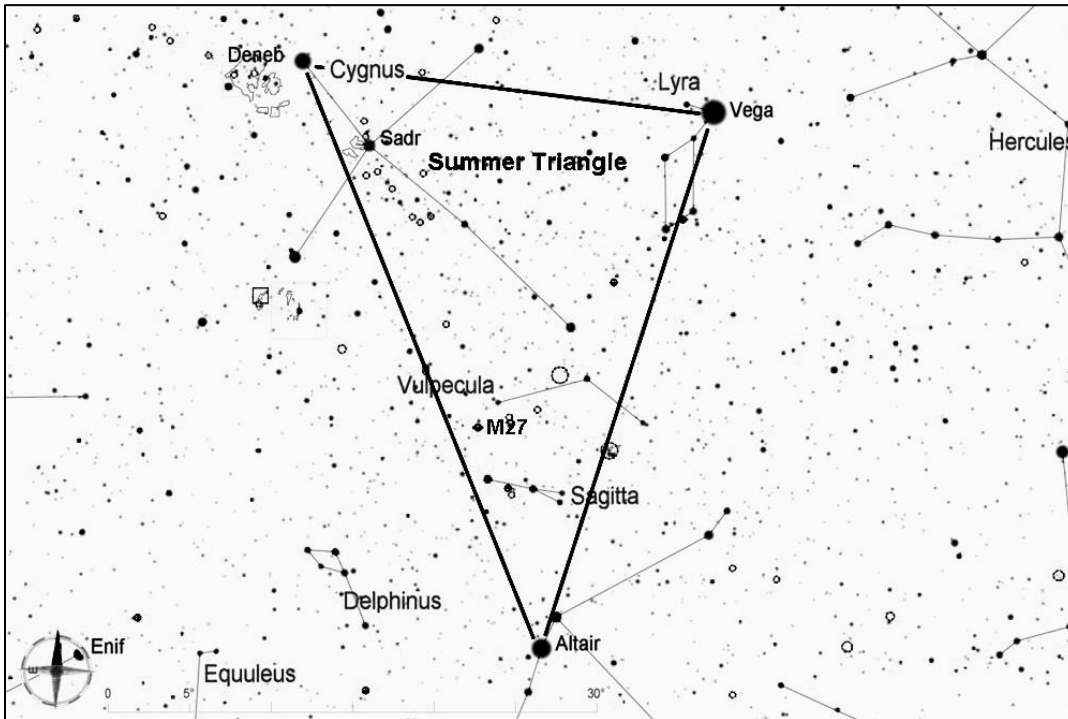


Messier 72, Globular Cluster, and Messier 73, Asterism in Aquarius

Messier 72 is a relatively dim cluster in the western part of Aquarius. At about magnitude 9.3, it is not difficult to see in even small telescopes, but resolving its 15th magnitude stars requires a fairly large aperture. It is a distant 55,000 light years away. M73 is one of the least interesting Messier objects, an asterism of 4 stars in a Y shape. The four stars are at very different distances and not a true cluster.



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 Altair in the constellation Aquila, the eagle.

From Altair, follow the stars that form the upper edge of Aquila the eagle's east wing, and use these stars as a pointer to take you to the constellation Capricornus. To me, the stars of Capricornus form a large, open-mouthed smile. Once you locate Capricornus, look for θ (Theta) in the center of the upper portion of the smile shape. From θ , the small asterism of M73 is about 5 degrees to the north-northwest. Through binoculars or a finderscope, you can use a vertical line of three 6th magnitude stars to guide you to M73, as shown in the inset below. M72 is about 1.5 degrees west of M73.

