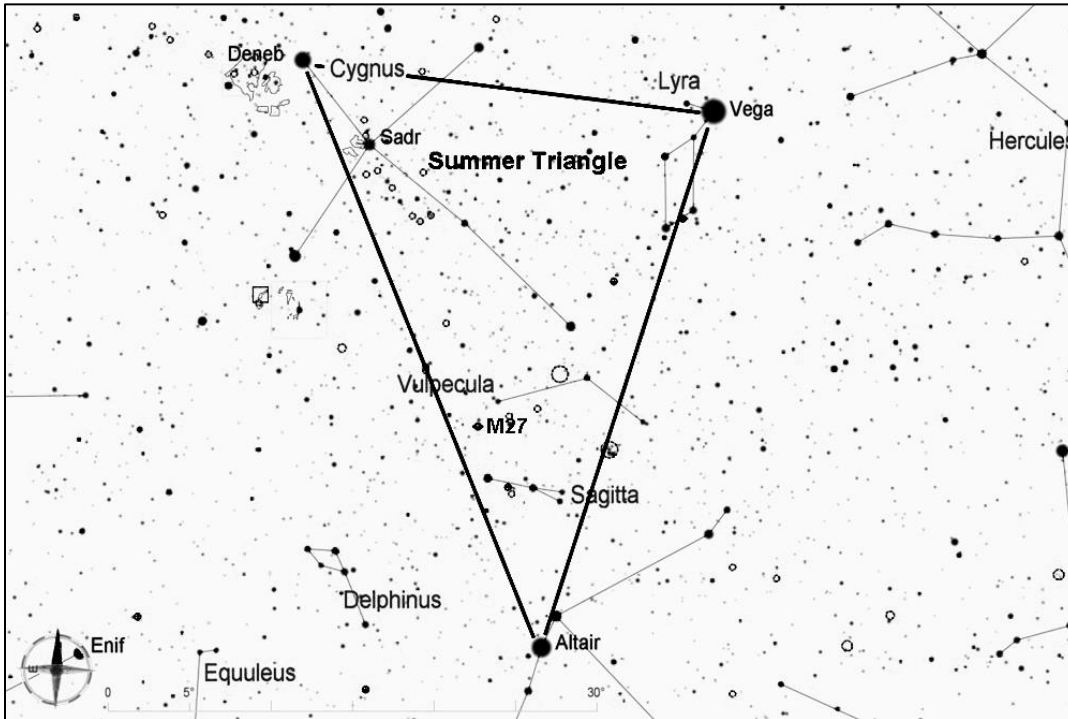


NGC 7009 (Caldwell 55), the Saturn Nebula in Aquarius

Planetary nebulae come in a variety of shapes, and NGC 7009 happens to have two thin projections that make it look a bit like the planet Saturn with its rings. The bright central region of this nebula has a distinct blue-green appearance. Also known as Caldwell 55, this nebula is small but bright, and it is a good target for telescopes of all sizes. Its distance is not well established, but it may be about 3000 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 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 , look about 5 degrees north for a fairly dim star in Aquarius, magnitude 4.5. The Saturn Nebula is slightly more than 1 degree to the west of this star.

