



Star Naming FAQs

How can I buy a star?

Since no one owns the stars, there is no one with the authority to sell a star to anyone. In short, you can't actually buy a star.

Can I name a star after someone?

While some companies offer star naming services for a fee, such names have no formal or official scientific validity. Since there are several different star naming companies, it is possible (although unlikely) that other companies could assign someone else's name to "your" star.

Bear in mind that you can do the same thing for free rather than paying a company to do it. The key is to select a star that you know you can find again. Name it anything you want, and then use a computer at home or at a library to print out a document proclaiming that name. That will be just as unofficial as anything the star naming companies can do.

Commercial star naming is similar to someone offering to name a street in New York City after whomever you want, for a fee. New Yorkers probably would never know about it, and if they did, they would ignore it. Mapmakers would not rush to update their maps. No one would start calling Broadway by the name you selected. If you told people about the name change as if you thought it was serious, they'd wonder why.

Can you tell me the names of companies that will name a star whatever I want for a fee?

No. We have no relationship of any kind with any star naming company. Star naming activities are completely unofficial money-making enterprises and have no standing among scientists.

Can you show us the star we just named?

No. We do not offer that service no matter what the star naming company's advertising might imply.

OK, then how can I find it myself?

You'll need a good telescope, not a toy, and you'll need to know how to use it.

With few exceptions, star naming companies will name a very faint star that cannot be seen without a good-sized telescope and fairly dark sky conditions far from cities. Finding it requires knowing exactly where in the sky that star is, when it is above your horizon, and how dim it will look. Some companies do not give positions accurately enough to do this, and you may have to find the star's scientific designation to look up the position. You have to be able to point the telescope at the star's precise position, and even then it may be difficult to figure out which star is the right one out of all the stars in the telescope's field of view. It can be a difficult, time-consuming, and often unsatisfying task.

Don't stars have names? How do you tell them apart? Why wouldn't mine be as good as any of the others?

Although a few hundred stars have traditional names (mostly dating back hundreds or even thousands of years) and a few have modern nicknames, most do not. They are instead identified by a variety of different catalog designations. The catalogs are created by astronomers for astronomers, and go into common use because they advance the science in some way. Some are useful simply because they catalog the positions of increasingly large numbers of stars. Others are important because they catalog by both position and measured distance, or because they catalog special types of stars such as variable stars or binary stars (or other celestial objects such as nebulae, star clusters, or galaxies). Importantly, when objects go into these catalogs and when the catalogs are used, no money changes hands. The catalogs and books created by star naming companies list randomly assigned names and are not used by astronomers. As a result, astronomers will not know the name you have assigned to a star.

By international agreement among astronomers, standards for star designations are set by the International Astronomical Union (IAU). Using the IAU as a clearing house eliminates the chaos and confusion that would result if people just named stars and other celestial objects whatever they wanted. For information about actual star designations, see this [IAU public statement](#).

Find more information about commercial star naming from the following reputable sources:

International Planetarium Society's position statement (<http://www.ips-planetarium.org/?starnaming>)

International Astronomical Union's position statement (https://www.iau.org/public/themes/buying_star_names/)

The American Astronomical Society (<https://aas.org/faq/can-i-buy-star>)

The Royal Greenwich Observatory (<http://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/naming-stars>)