

# So you want a telescope

After finding out I have a telescope, and of my interest in Astronomy, I am often asked "What kind of telescope should I get my (self, kid, spouse, father, fill in the blank). My first thought is to say they can buy mine so I can get a bigger, better, different telescope. But in reality, the best answer is usually to get a good astronomy book.

Unless you are exactly like me, you will need to get a foundation of what is in the sky before you drag out a telescope. Going out on clear nights with just a lawn chair and your eyes will give you an indication if you actually want a telescope. There are many uncomfortable aspects of sky watching and astronomy. If you add to this lugging and setting up a telescope, you may find you really don't want to do this.

Spring in Ohio is a good time to start with your quest for a telescope. The clear nights are becoming a bit warmer from the winter deep chills, and the bugs aren't out as much. If you can take the few mosquitoes and the slightly chilly nature of the spring nights, you can then look forward to the summer nights. In most cases the summer nights in Ohio are quite comfortable for watching the night sky. If someone could do something about all the mosquitoes. Yes, you will be a target of these blood thirsty little creatures. Then there are the numerous encounters with other wildlife. Skunks will generally not spray, unless you scare them. Stepping on a skunk tends to scare it. Raccoons on the other hand don't fear much. Keep the snacks well sealed, and don't leave your car open. In NW Ohio that is all you generally have to worry about. But I did hear talk of a wandering Black Bear in the area!

Other parts of the country will have their own night time problems. Scorpions, cougars, wolves, bears, poisonous snakes, and the strange people who come out at night in our larger metropolitan areas, are all possible things you could run into

trying to look at the night sky. Do you really wonder why I don't automatically tell a person which telescope to buy.

Astronomy and star watching is not for everyone. We are a strange breed. We tend to enjoy being out in the dark (the darker the better), communing with the wild, lugging heavy equipment out for maybe 2-4 hours of finding and studying a specific nebulae or feature on the Moon. Then we will pack up and lug that equipment back in. If you can't spend 1/2 hour after lugging your lawn chair out just to look at the sky, well this hobby isn't really for you. A telescope really won't help.

Ok, you got past the looking at the stars for 1/2 hour, and you enjoyed it. What next? Get a good astronomy book. Take the time to learn what is up there. Before you get a telescope you need to know what you're going to be looking at. Astronomy books and star charts are the road maps to the night sky. You should be able to find at least 1 or 2 constellations before you purchase that scope. Checkout [Sky and Telescope](#) or [Astronomy Magazines](#) at your local library or bookstore. They will have a sky map of the current month.

You say you've done all that and still want a telescope? Now we're talking. Get some good binoculars and come back in a month or two. □ No really, I wish someone had told me that at the beginning of my astronomy connection. I still don't have a good pair of binoculars, and my desire for them is growing. 7×50, 8×50 and 10×50 are all good binoculars to start with in astronomy. Oh yes, the first number is the magnification of the binoculars (7 times, 8 times or 10 times) the second number is the size of the front lens in millimeters. The bigger front lens collects more light, and the higher magnification allows you to see more. 2 big notes!! High magnification may seem like a good thing, but too much causes what I call the jitters. It is hard to hold binoculars steady, high magnification makes this much more apparent. And bigger front lenses may also seem like a good idea. Bigger lenses,

means the binoculars will weigh more. Heavy binoculars also cause the jitters.

Ok, Ok you got this far? You should get a 7 inch Questar Maksutov. Make sure you get a well built tripod with this since this telescope needs good support. And when you get tired of astronomy let me know, I may have a home for your scope... That's just a joke folks. When you find out what that telescope costs you may understand. For the real answer, stop back in the future. I work up a list of good beginner scopes.

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## Telescope review 1 – The Questar

I really can't say much about this telescope. Most of my memories of that night were trying to look again and again at the orange-red dot that was centered in the telescopes field of view. I was 5 or 6 years old. My sisters were bigger than me at that time. Why bring this up now, since it won't be of any use for those looking to buy a telescope? The answer is simple. This is the scope that focused my attention on all things in the night sky.

For the record, I did find out (when I was much older) that this was a 3.5 inch Questar scope. It was a production test scope with a brand new mirror material (called "Cervit"). My father worked for O-I in the 60's as part of the quality control of various telescope mirrors made with "Cervit". The Questar company was looking into the possibility of using this material for their scopes. Questar telescopes have a history of being a "Quality Scope", so I was probably looking through

a good one. I will have to check the histories to see if Questar ever put the Cervit mirrors into production. I know that they now use a different zero-expansion material. Might be fun trying to find one.

On to the review, from the memories of a 49 year old trying to remember something at the age of 6.

I was frustrated (mad) that I didn't get to look through the scope as much as I wanted. I remember being told that if I didn't settle down, I wouldn't be able to look again. I think I sat as still as I ever did. I got to look a lot. My sisters then complained I was "hogging" it. I didn't care.

The color of whatever I was looking are still clear in my mind. After years of looking through other scopes the only thing that comes close is Mars or one of the red stars of similar color. I can't remember if it was a disk or a dot, so that is of no help I just remember a bright red-orange object in the middle of the blackest background I ever saw. I just was drawn to that telescope. Unfortunately, my father took the scope back. I had to survive, my growing fascination with space, with any books or magazines I could find. At that time, it was hard to find them for my reading level.

I forced myself to learn to read better, because I wanted to understand all I could. I thought if I really applied myself, my dad would bring back the telescope, or maybe get another. That was never meant to be. Dad noticed I was interested in space, but never put a connection with that one night with a telescope. It was the middle of the space race, so the apparent assumption was that I was interested in rockets. Those were cool to, so I didn't complain.

Jump forward a few years... Just after my mother died, I took my dad to the Ritter Planetarium and Brooks Observatory at the University of Toledo. This was the closest mirror made with 'Cervit'. Yes, my dad was on the quality control team for

that mirror. It was too cloudy to actually look through the scope that evening, but we did get to look at it. Dad was in center stage, explaining how the mirror was made, and all the problems they had casting "good" glass. I also explained that evening about how much I remembered the scope that one summer evening so long ago.

I was never able to get back out the the observatory when they had open view with the 'Cervit' scope when Dad was alive, but I did go again shortly after he died. Do you know the object we looked at was the planet Mars. It was red-orange in the middle of a deep black sky. Oh how the memories just came flooding back. A wonderful evening.

Later a review or two of scopes I actually use...