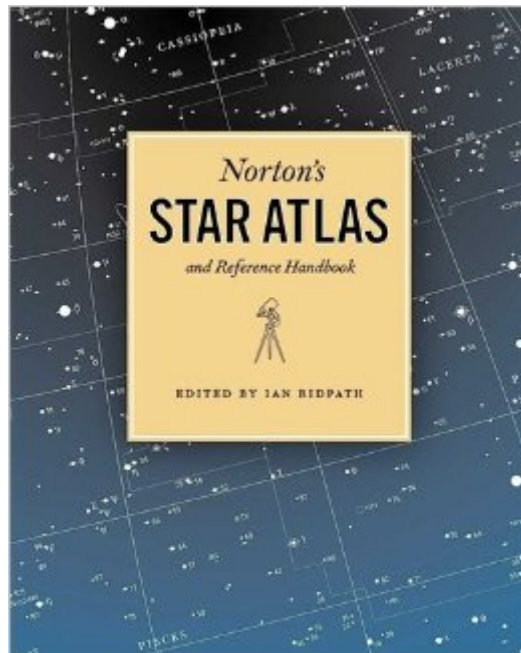


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Norton's Star Atlas And Reference Handbook: And Reference Handbook, 20th Edition



Synopsis

First published in 1910, coinciding with the first of two appearances by Halley's Comet during the book's life, Norton's owes much of its legendary success to its unique maps, arranged in slices known as gores, each covering approximately one-fifth of the sky. Every star visible to the naked eye under the clearest skies - down to magnitude 6.5 - is charted along with star clusters, nebulae and galaxies. Extensive tables of data on interesting objects for observation accompany each of the precision drawn maps. Preceding the maps is the unique and authoritative reference handbook covering time-keeping and positional measurements on the celestial sphere; the Sun, Moon and other bodies of the Solar System; telescopes and other equipment for observing and imaging the sky; and stars, nebulae and galaxies. Throughout, succinct fundamental principles and practical tips guide the reader into the night sky. The appendices Units and Notation, Astronomical Constants, Symbols and Abbreviations, and Useful Addresses complete what has long been the only essential reference for the stargazer." Now presented more accessibly than ever before, the text and tables of the 20th edition have been revised and updated to take account of the new and exciting developments in our observation of the cosmos. The redesigned star maps offer outstanding legibility, in the living room or under a red light in the dark outdoors.

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Customer Reviews

The content of this atlas is superb. Having started with a 13th edition in 1959, I have learned to love the layout of the charts and in this edition they show up beautifully under red light. The reference notes in the 20th edition are still have the same idiosyncratic style as the old edition, even though

the content has been completely changed to reflect the advances in astronomy over 50 years. It is a delight to browse through the reference notes and use the atlas when observing. Now for the bad news. You shouldn't really use it, except as a coffee table exhibit. My 13th edition is still in good condition after extensive use, but after less than a year of not very robust use, the 20th has now cracked at the spine and pages have started coming out. It astounds me that the publishers can invest so much effort in producing a product with such high quality content and then proceed to use an inferior binding. Star atlases have to be taken into the field and roughed up a bit and get a little damp with dew. If they can't handle this, there is no point in buying them.

In a previous review I expressed disappointment that a printing error seriously marred the usefulness of the latest edition of this updated classic. Well, the publisher tracked me down and sent a copy of the second printing. I am delighted to report that all the errors have been fixed and this new edition is a wonderful addition to any amateur astronomer's bookshelf (or eyepiece case). The text begins with excellent discussions of time and celestial coordinate systems (often confusing to beginner and long-timer alike). The new higher contrast moon maps are a major improvement over the washed-out maps in some previous editions. The heart of the atlas are the 16 starcharts, presented in the two-disk/six gore format familiar to lovers of the previous editions of the Norton's. These maps are more readable than ever, giving visual precedence to the stars themselves rather than labels, grid lines, etc. A thoughtful touch was to print the charts with a generous gutter margin so that stars near the celestial equator don't get trapped out of sight down in the spine of the book. As a matter of style I differ (perhaps) with another reviewer who would have liked to have seen color photographs--I guess I am nostalgic for the familiar "Norton's Green" and appreciate that editor Ridpath and designer Nix have continued the tradition in what is otherwise a major update of the classic. They are to be commended for this beautiful, useful, and authoritative book.

My first impression of this new edition is, "What a beautiful book" ! And indeed, a lot of improvements have been introduced, with substantial new materials. One thing most people forgot to mention about this "old classic" is that it does not shy away from hard technical definitions, tables, and quite a few key equations, which a serious observer will eventually need. Yes, it does not contain color astrophoto plates to make the readers feel warm and fuzzy, but it does contain more key information in one place. I wish the other more detailed atlases could consider adding information like these in Norton's. After browsing the atlas chart pages for a few minutes, I started to worry a little bit, especially after seeing the other reviewers' comments about the Green labels/fonts

on top of green Milky Way background color. Under normal lighting it is certainly readable, but one tends to think the old black labels might have worked better... Well, worry NOT ! When viewed in the darkness of the night under red flashlights, the green labels on green milky way background actually turn out to be clearer ! This design for better field usage justifies the choice of two-color printing in this new edition. It's the same price as the previous edition, but in hardcover and heavy duty paper. What more can one ask for ? Definitely a must for any astronomy lover !

Norton's has weaknesses which other reviewers have pointed out, to be sure, but a tremendous advantage is its layout of the star charts. Unlike most other charts out there, it shows huge swaths of the sky (60 degrees north to 60 degrees south, and well over 4 hours in RA) just as you see them when you're out in the dark trying to get oriented in Deep Heaven. Other charts show little chunks of sky--Norton's shows just what you see in a great wide band from well behind the zenith to further south than most of us will ever see. And as someone else pointed out, the reference material interleaved between the sky charts, though not exhaustive, is very useful. I use Norton's constantly along with the Sky Atlas 2000 and Burnham's Celestial Handbook (and websites to update Burnham's data), and the combination of the three is perfect for most of my own observing. I have dozens of other books on my shelves but these are the ones I rely on. For teaching astronomy I substitute the Audubon Field Guide to the Night Sky for the Sky Atlas and Burnham's, and my students love it because Norton's helps them find their way around the sky and the Field Guide description of the constellations tells them about what they see. If I were stranded on a desert island (hope, hope) and couldn't take my beloved and well-annotated Sky Atlas 2000 and Burnham's, I'd take Norton's and the Audubon Field Guide as a very good substitute. I always recommend Norton's, the Audubon Field Guide, and binoculars to beginners--the Sky Atlas 2000, Burnham's, and a telescope can come later (or sooner, for the passionate).

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