

Cirrus



NOAA

Lacy or wispy clouds that form from ice crystals at high altitudes and have a fibrous (hairlike) and/or silky sheen appearance. Cirrus clouds are relatively transparent and do not diminish the brightness of the sun when they cross it.

Cirrostratus



CC/ Ian Jacobs

Transparent, whitish veil clouds that form from ice crystals at high altitudes and have a fibrous (hair-like) or smooth appearance. Cirrostratus clouds are very extensive, nearly covering the whole sky. These clouds produce the appearance of a halo when covering the sun or moon.

Cirrocumulus



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Broken layer of small fleecy clouds that form at high altitudes from degraded cirrus/cirrostratus clouds. This cloud is thin and patchy and has a rippled or granulated appearance.

Stratus



NPS

A generally gray cloud layer with a uniform base at low altitudes which may produce a rain or snow. When the sun is visible through this cloud, its outline is clearly discernible. Often when a layer of stratus breaks up and dissipates blue sky is seen.

Altostratus



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Gray or bluish cloud sheets at middle altitudes that totally or partially cover the sky. They are thin enough to regularly reveal the sun as if seen through a translucent object. Altostratus clouds occasionally cause very light precipitation.

Nimbostratus



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The continuous rain cloud, this dark gray cloud layer is found at a low altitude and produces falling rain or snow. It is formed from thickening altostratus clouds and is thick enough to blot out the sun.

Stratocumulus



CC/Andreas Christen

White or dark gray low altitude rounded masses of stratus that form lines, groups or waves. These clouds are often seen before or after severe weather. However, stratocumulus clouds generally do not produce precipitation, and when they do, it tends to come in the form of light rain or snow.

Cumulus



NOAA

Detached relatively low altitude rounded masses with a puffy, fluffy or cotton-like appearance. The sunlit parts of these clouds are brilliant white, while their bases are relatively dark and horizontal. Cumulus develops on days of clear skies due to convection.

Alto cumulus



CC/Les Chatfield

White or gray patch, sheet or layered clouds, generally composed of rounded masses or rolls found at middle altitudes. Precipitation from these clouds is rare, and if it does fall, it does not reach the ground.

Cumulonimbus



CC/Richard Droker

The thunderstorm cloud, this heavy and dense cloud is found at a low altitude in the shape of a towering mass. The upper portion is usually flattened into the shape of an anvil. The base of this cloud is very dark.

Cumulonimbus clouds produce extreme weather including heavy downpours, lightening, hail storms, and tornadoes.

Lenticular



NPS

Stationary, lens or saucer shaped clouds that form at high altitudes.

Lenticular clouds develop when wind is forced up and over a topographic barrier, such as a mountain, that is oriented perpendicular to the wind direction. When sufficient moisture is present above mountain-top level, lenticular clouds develop.