



# Cloud Types

There are three basic types of clouds. Their names come from Latin roots, which are used to describe what the cloud looks like to us (the common observer) when viewing the clouds from the ground.

Name/Latin Root	Cumulus	Stratus	Cirrus	Nimbus
Translation	Heap	Layer	Curl	Rain

**Cumulus** clouds are the puffy clouds that look like cotton balls in the sky. Cumulus clouds are usually a sign of fair weather. In the event that cumulus clouds stretch and get taller, thunderstorms may result. Cumulus clouds are often fairly close to the ground.

**Stratus** clouds look like flat sheets of clouds. Stratus clouds may stay in one place for several days at a time and usually indicate overcast weather or a steady rain.

**Cirrus** clouds usually have a feathery look. Cirrus clouds are up so high in the sky that they are actually made up of particles of ice! When scattered in a clear blue sky, they often indicate fair weather.

**Nimbus** clouds are rain clouds and indicate some sort of precipitation.

By combining cloud names or adding prefixes, we can create new words and meanings to describe various other types of clouds, such as:

## High Clouds:

- **Cirrocumulus** – these clouds appear as small, rounded puffs. They are usually white but sometimes appear gray. These clouds are most often seen during the winter months and indicate clear but cold weather. When appearing to cover much of the sky, they are often referred to as a “mackerel sky” because they resemble scales on a fish.
- **Cirrostratus** – these clouds are sheet-like, thin clouds that appear to cover the entire sky. These clouds usually appear in the sky 12-24 hours before a snow or rain storm.

## Middle Clouds:

- **Alto cumulus** – these clouds form in groups, appear grayish-white in color, and are usually surefire indicators of thunderstorms.
- **Altostratus** – these clouds appear to cover the whole sky and appear gray or blue in color. Seeing these clouds will often indicate that a snow or rain storm is coming.

## Low Clouds:

- **Stratocumulus** – these clouds appear low to the ground, lumpy, and gray in color. These clouds may indicate precipitation, but only light precipitation (such as drizzling rain).
- **Nimbostratus** – these clouds often cover the entire sky and are dark gray in color. They indicate continuous rain or snow.

## Clouds With Vertical Growth:

- **Cumulonimbus** – these clouds are commonly called “storm clouds” and are associated with all types of heavy precipitation, such as rain, snow, sleet, and hail, as well as lightning and even tornadoes.

There are still other clouds that don't fit into any of the categories described above. Some clouds you may want to look for and research further are: contrails (otherwise known as “jet streams”), lenticular, Kelvin-Helmholtz, and mammatus.