

12 Altair in the constellation Aquila

Distance

16.7 light years

Luminosity

11 times that of the sun

Colour

Yellow white

Surface temperature

7,600 K

Diameter

1.8 times the diameter of the sun

(To Planet Trail scale: 2.5 m)

Mass

1.7 solar masses

Evening visibility

July to October

Altair is the brightest star in the constellation Aquila and the eighth brightest fixed star we can see in the sky.

It has been discovered that Altair spins extremely quickly on its own axis. Its rotation period is only 6.5 hours, whereas our sun takes around 25 days. Because of this speedy rotation, it has an oblate shape, in other words it is significantly flattened at its poles.

Like our sun, Altair is a main sequence star, meaning that it produces energy in its core through fusing hydrogen into helium. Its hydrogen supply will last for around a billion more years. At that point it will turn into a red giant before becoming a white dwarf like our sun.

Altair forms the Summer Triangle together with Deneb in Cygnus and Vega in Lyra.

Because of their relative brightness at twilight in the summer months, the three fixed stars of the Summer Triangle are among the first stars visible in the evening sky.

Other bright stars in the constellation Aquila:

Tarazed Distance: 390 light years

Deneb el Okab Australis Distance: 83 light years

12 Constellation Aquila

The constellation Aquila is one of three impressive constellations in the summer and autumn sky, along with Cygnus and Lyra. Its bright main star, Altair, makes it easy to find with the help of the Summer Triangle. Aquila lies closer to the horizon than Cygnus and Lyra. The constellations Capricorn and Sagittarius can be found lower still, below Aquila.

The bright band of the Milky Way runs through the constellation. Several dark nebulae as well as star-rich areas are visible in the constellation Aquila with the aid of binoculars. It features an array of bright gas nebulae and several star clusters. The constellation is depicted as a flying eagle, although the position of the main star Altair (which translates as flying eagle) can vary significantly.

There are several myths about the constellation Aquila. Our version comes from the story of Hercules:

Prometheus stole fire from the gods against Zeus' wishes and brought it to humans. As punishment, Zeus had him chained to a rock in the Caucasus Mountains. Each day, an eagle came by and ate from the chained man's liver. But as Prometheus was immortal, his liver kept renewing itself. The torture seemed never-ending. Hercules discovered Prometheus, freed him and killed the eagle with his arrow.