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Understanding clouds and fog

Clouds are usually the most obvious feature of the sky. They both reflect weather patterns and play a role in what the weather does. The links below take you to a great deal of information about clouds.

Locations of clouds

- **Low-level clouds:** (generally found below 6,500 feet) Low-level clouds are usually composed of liquid water droplets, but they can have snow and ice crystals in cold weather.
- **Mid-level clouds:** (generally found between 6,500 and 23,000 feet) Most mid-level clouds are composed of liquid water droplets during summer and a liquid droplet-ice crystal mix during winter. Mid-level cloud names are preceded by an "alto" prefix.
- **High-level clouds:** (generally found above 20,000 feet) High-level clouds are composed of ice crystals and tend to be very thin and wispy. High-level cloud names are preceded by a "cirro" prefix.

Names represent different kinds of clouds

- [Stratus](#) clouds are a uniform gray and usually cover most of the sky.
- [Cirrus](#) clouds are thin and high in the sky.
- [Cumulus](#) clouds are lumpy and can stretch high into the sky.
- [Thunderstorms](#) are cumulus clouds, sometimes called "thunderheads."
- [Mammatus](#) clouds have pouches that hang down.

People and clouds

- [Conspiracy theories find menace in contrails](#)
- [Understanding cloud seeding](#)

Different kinds of fog, where fog forms

- [Fog, how to forecast when it's possible](#)
- [Advection fog](#) forms when humid air flows over cold ground or water.

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- [Radiation fog](#) forms on generally clear, cool nights.
- [Steam fog](#) forms over water, often in the fall.
- [Overnight rain](#) can enhance fog that forms in the morning.
- **Precipitation fog** forms when rain or snow falls.. As precipitation falls into drier air below the cloud, the liquid drops or ice crystals evaporate or sublimate directly into water vapor. The water vapor increases the moisture content of the air while cooling the air. This often saturates the air below the cloud and allows fog to form.
- **Upslope fog** is very common along large hills and mountains. It forms when winds blow up the side of a hill or mountain, which cools the air.
- **Valley fog** forms in mountain valleys during winter and can be more than 1,500 feet thick. Often, the winter sun is not strong enough to evaporate the fog during the day. When the air cools again the following night, the fog often becomes thicker, which makes it even harder for the sun to burn it off the following day. These fogs can last for several days until strong winds blow the moist air out of the valley. The tendency for cool, dense air to pool at the bottom of valleys also enhances valley fog.
- [Pop-up map: Yearly average days with fog in the USA](#)

Clouds and the atmosphere, the water cycle

- [Why cloudy nights tend to be warmer](#)
- [Understanding water in the atmosphere](#)
- [Dust can stifle rain formation in clouds.](#)

Questions and answers about clouds

- [Help on identifying an unusual cloud](#)
- [Answers archive: Clouds, fog, rain, snow, drizzle](#)

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