

Clouds and Weather Forecasting

High clouds above 18,000 feet are cirrus clouds.

Cloud	Weather Forecast
Cirrus clouds are the most common of the high clouds. They are composed of ice and consist of long, thin, wispy streamers.	Cirrus clouds are usually white and predict fair weather. Sometimes called mares tails, they stream with the wind. By watching the movement of cirrus clouds you can tell from which direction weather is approaching. The appearance of cirrus clouds usually indicates that a change in weather will occur within 24 hours.
Cirrostratus are sheetlike, thin clouds that usually cover the entire sky. The sun or moon can shine through Cirrostratus clouds.	Cirrostratus clouds usually come 12-24 hours before a rain or snowstorm.
Cirrocumulus are small, rounded puffs that usually appear in long rows. They are usually white, but sometimes appear gray.	Cirrocumulus are usually seen in the winter and indicate fair, but cold, weather. In the tropics, they may indicate an approaching hurricane.

Medium high clouds occupy altitudes of 6,500 feet to 18,000 feet.

These clouds are called **alto** clouds. Alto clouds are used to predict weather changes in 6 to 12 hours.

Cloud	Weather Forecast
An Altostratus cloud usually covers the whole sky. The cloud looks gray or blue-gray. The sun or moon may shine through an Altostratus cloud, but will appear hazy.	An altostratus cloud usually forms ahead of storms with continuous rain or snow.
Alto cumulus clouds are grayish-white with one part of the cloud darker than the other. Alto cumulus clouds usually form in groups.	If you see Alto cumulus clouds on a warm, sticky morning, be prepared for thunderstorms by late afternoon.

Low clouds, called **stratus** clouds, are at altitudes up to 6,500 feet.

These clouds form a solid sheet or layer of cloud mass.

Cloud	Weather Forecast
Stratus clouds are uniform gray in color and almost cover the entire sky.	Light mist or drizzle is sometimes associated with Stratus clouds. A Stratus cloud touching the ground is fog.
Stratocumulus clouds are low, puffy and gray. Most form in rows with blue sky visible in between.	Rain rarely occurs with Stratocumulus clouds, however, they can turn into Nimbostratus.
Nimbostratus clouds are dark gray with a ragged base.	Rain or snow is associated with Nimbostratus clouds.
Clouds with vertical growth	
Vertically developing clouds are the Cumulus (puffy) type.	These small, lumpy clouds are low "fair weather" clouds.
Cumulonimbus are generally known as thunderstorm clouds. They are cumulus clouds that develop vertically (up) going from small, fair weather clouds to large, boiling, vertically-growing monster.	High winds will flatten the top of the cloud into an anvil-like shape. Cumulonimbus are associated with heavy rain, snow, hail, lightning, and tornadoes. The anvil usually points in the direction the storm is moving