

Star Guide: Unwrapping the cosmos

By Tony Berendsen

A lifelong passion for science and astronomy began for me with the gift of a Christmas telescope when I was a child. My parents did a pretty good job picking out the telescope I got, but that was 1959, there really wasn't much to pick from in those days.

Today things are very different. There is an abundance of optical systems, mounts, computer drive systems, eyepieces, and cameras, all of them just one mouse click away. That's the easy part, more difficult is which one to buy.

In the next two Star Guide articles I'll offer suggestions for good telescopes to buy that I guarantee will delight the receiver. Also, I am partial to Celestron telescopes, they aren't the only manufacture of telescopes, but in my experience they are the best.

The first thing to consider when buying a scope is what will it be used for, and at what level of expertise: novice, intermediate, or advanced.



Telescopes can make an
perfect gift.
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If the scope you plan to give will be used for daytime and nighttime observing, a refractor might be the best way to go, but for these two articles I'll concentrate on nighttime usage only, recommending reflecting telescopes with larger apertures (larger mirror size) that will collect and focus more light to the eyepiece, making dim celestial objects easier to see.

Let's start with the novice and divide into two levels, child novice and adult novice. This is an important distinction since a child novice may be excited to receive a scope at first, but not stick with it as much as an adult might, so a smaller investment might be wise.

For the child novice, a small table top reflecting telescope is a great way to go. I suggest **Celestron's First Scope**. The scope comes ready to use after easy assembly right out of the box. Prices vary slightly depending on options; from \$49 to \$59. The scope is very easy to use, and uses standard 1.25-inch eyepieces. The night after Christmas your novice can see stars, the moon, and with a little practice, and help from

parents, see planets, too.

For the adult novice, add a tripod, a computerized navigational system, a little larger aperture and you have the **Celestron 114LCM**.

The LCM telescope is a great introduction into the modern astronomical telescope world for less than \$350. It uses standard 1.25-inch eyepieces, is light and portable, and very easy to assemble. Most important, it uses a sophisticated computerized navigational system, the same type of system used on Celestron's expert level telescopes that are much more expensive. So driving this telescope around the cosmos is a great way to test a novice's ambition. The telescope can also be used as a camera by adding a **NexImage Solar System Imager** for the moon and bright planets.

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