

# What you get when you “buy” a star name

“Immortalize your loved one by naming a star after them.”

We have all seen the ads or heard them on the radio, companies offering to “name a star” after the person of your choice for a moderate fee. What do you really get when you “buy” a star name? [Always do your homework to know “what” you are buying.]

## What you get

1. The identity of the star and the name of the person being gifted the star entered and “preserved” the company’s official registry,
2. A decorative certificate with the person’s name and the identity of the star assigned to them, and some information about it,
3. A star chart showing the star’s position in the sky and coordinates of the star so you can find it if you wish,
4. Other optional items (for an additional cost).

The impression you get is your loved one will be remembered for all time because a star carries their name. Or does it? What do you really get when you “buy” a star name for someone?

First, let’s be clear. No one owns the stars. No one has rights to any star. When you purchase a “star name,” you are paying a company to record a person’s name in association with a star. You pay for a package of records prepared for you, created by and maintained by that company. That record has no meaning outside of their company. Except for the person who bought the package and the person to whom the gift is given. If that company goes out of business, the registry could cease to exist.

People buy star names for sentimental reasons. In truth, that is the only value a commercially purchased star name has. A commercial star name has no scientific significance. It is merely the product of the company and has no meaning to the rest of the world. As long as you understand that and you are satisfied with it, all is well.

## Product details

Here is a breakdown of the products on the “star registry” market:

- The registry is simply a privately owned database. There may be a printed counterpart. Still, since no one but the company will likely see the database, it may be an electronic record. The registry could be a simple database or spreadsheet on the seller’s personal computer, created with a standard program

like Access or Excel. The company often includes a guarantee the registry is registered in the U.S. copyright office. The company might have submitted a copyright application for their products, but perhaps not. According to copyright law, merely printing the copyright symbol © on a product you create suffices for copyright. (Bet you didn't know that.)

- The certificate is usually quite decorative. Some companies offer your choice of certificate designs. These are generally printed with a standard desktop printer. If you are in a hurry, a couple of companies provide an option to print the certificate on your printer immediately after purchase.
- A star map marking the location of "your" star in the sky. Be aware. Unless you choose a package that includes a "bright" star or a star visible to the naked eye, chances are the star you "purchase" will be too faint to be seen with the naked eye. Some will be too faint for most telescopes available to amateur astronomers as well.
- Before buying a star, name read ALL FAQs, information pages, Terms of Service, Disclaimers, the fine print on the bottom of the webpage, etc.
- Options can vary widely from one company to another. See below.

## Option details

In addition to the basic packages, options or additional items may include:

- Guarantee the star assigned to you will be visible to the naked eye,
- An opportunity to purchase a name for a binary star,
- Choice of star brightness – bright, medium, dim but still visible to the naked eye, or dim requiring a telescope to be seen,
- Option to request a star in a particular constellation of your choice,
- Personalized messages,
- A selection of certificate frames,
- Toys,
- Star or astronomy-themed jewelry,
- Memorial stars for a deceased person.

A couple of companies will guarantee the star, or the constellation in which it resides will be visible all year round. This guarantee means it will be close enough to one of the celestial poles to be visible above the horizon at sometime during the night.

One company offers a choice of stars within three specific constellations. If they include stars of all brightness levels, they could sell stars within those constellations for many years without exhausting the supply. What if they guarantee the star will be visible to the naked eye? They could quickly run out of stars to sell. Then what? Would they sell the same star twice? Or they change the choice of constellations, making a new group of stars available for offer.

## Star Naming/Adoption for Fundraising(Contribute to science, literally)

There is one way you can give a star to someone that will have actual value to the scientific community. You can adopt a star for the Pale Blue Dot Adopt-A-Star project. < <https://adoptastar.org> >

You can adopt a star for yourself or someone else. The Adopt-A-Star project raises funds to support the search for planets around other stars. A star will be chosen from images captured by the Kepler and Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) missions. You will receive a certificate and a star chart for your adopted star. There are options for adopting bright stars, double stars, stars that may have planets or stars where planets have been discovered.

You can give a star name to someone you love, but wouldn't it be wonderful to give a gift that shows your love and also contributes to science? Before adopting a star, read ALL FAQs, information pages, Terms of Service, Disclaimers, the fine print on the bottom of the webpage, etc.

### Do it Yourself Star Naming.

Given the fact that no one owns the stars, there is nothing to stop anyone from giving an already name star an "unofficial nickname." So you can do it yourself, here is how.

1. Go out at night with family, friends, and the "Star Name" recipient.
2. Point to a "bright" easy to find a star.
3. Say something like "From now on, WE will refer to this star as ' \_\_\_\_\_ ' whenever we see it, we will think of you."
4. Make your own Star Naming certificate.
5. Use the money you save for something cool like
  - a. Magazine Subscriptions
  - b. Books
  - c. A gift membership to a local astronomy club
  - d. Toys
  - e. Jewelry
  - f. Gourmet meal
  - g. Cake
  - h. Ice Cream
  - i. Cash
  - j. Donation to the recipient's favorite charity[Good If it is Memorial stars for a deceased person]
  - k. etc.
6. Just do not try to use the new unofficial nickname on a "test." :-)

## In conclusion

The International Astronomical Union (IAU) is the only body to assign official star names. (There are some exceptions for new discoveries.) The IAU does not sell star names. The IAU either assigns catalog numbers to stars or recognizes catalogs developed by astronomers. The scientific community does not recognize the star names that a company sells. It will not appear in any scientific journal. It exists only within the records of the company from whom you have purchased it.

Everyone has the freedom to “buy” a star name. However, if you approach an astronomer to ask them about “your” star, remember they may not be familiar with the registry where you made your purchase. After all, there are many on the market, all selling the same stars. There is no guarantee an amateur or professional astronomer will be willing to show you “your star.” Some will be annoyed as they have very low regard for companies who sell star names. They often view the companies as opportunists taking advantage of the unwitting purchaser. Others will be willing to help but may not be able to either because the star may not be visible that night, or it may be too dim to be seen with the equipment on hand.

Remember, star registries are merely the creation of the person selling the certificate. The registry company could be simply a person with a personal computer, a printer, and sometimes even generic or free software to generate the documents they sell you. For the company, there is little cost to produce these registries and products. It is almost pure profit. You could do it yourself.

Instead of paying money for a commercial registry, make a game out of naming stars. You can call anything you wish. It could be a tree, a river, a rock formation, a star, anything. Even if it has a name, there is no reason you couldn't give it a personal name. That name will not be official, but it could be fun and could have special meaning for your friends and family. You could even make up your own certificate to show off the new name.