**What’s That Cloud? Your Guide to Cloudspotting**

<https://blog.nature.org/science/2020/09/22/whats-that-cloud-your-guide-to-cloudspotting/>

**Layer Clouds: Stratus, altostratus, and cirrostratus.** All three of these clouds form blanket-like layers in the sky. Each one can be found at a different altitude.

Stratus clouds are nondescript, thick, blanket-like clouds that form low in the sky. Think of the last gray, overcast day when it didn’t rain… those were probably stratus clouds. (Fog is just a ground-level stratus cloud.)

Altostratus clouds are mid-level, gray, blanket-like clouds. These clouds are uniform and featureless, and can sometimes produce rain.

Cirrostratus clouds are thinner, transparent, and found at high altitudes. Think of hazy, veil-like clouds found high in the sky. They’re also whiter than the other layer clouds and can produce sun halos.

**Heap clouds: Cumulus, altocumulus, and cirrocumulus.** All three of these clouds are puffy and again each is found at a different level of the atmosphere.

Cumulus clouds are the archetypal poofy, white, cotton-ball clouds that we all draw as kids. (No surprise, they’re the easiest to identify.) They’re lower in the atmosphere, white to light grey in color, and are often found in mostly sunny skies.

Altocumulus clouds are found in the mid-levels of the troposphere. Whereas cumulus clouds remind me of cotton balls or marshmellows, altocumulus clouds remind me of popcorn, because they’re often found bunched together in heaps or rolls. They’re also one of the most variable cloud types.

Cirrocumulus clouds are high, thin, white clouds that remind me of wave patterns on shallow water or feather down. Cirrocumulus and altocumulus clouds are sometimes called a “mackerel sky” because their pattern resembles fish scales. They’re one of the least-spotted cloud genera, and they create absolutely fantastic sunsets.