

Orion Nebula (M42)

Easily seen with the naked eye on a dark night, the Orion Nebula takes on a new dimension when seen in infrared light.

It's a place of star birth, from the Trapezium cluster of massive stars whose light sculpt the dust around them, to the youngest protostars buried within the densest clouds of dust.

The central region of this nebula is only a small part of a vast expanse of gas and dust that is one of the largest star nurseries in our Milky Way galaxy. NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope has observed a large swath of this cloud, revealing the extensive dust structures and the myriad baby stars hidden within.

Jets of material streaming out from these protostars light up as they pass through the surrounding gas clouds. In this rendering of infrared light the jets appear as greenish arcs and filaments against the backdrop of red dust.

Hubble's detailed visible light view of Orion complements Spitzer's infrared vision. When merged together we have a more complete way of seeing this familiar object.

Blue and green features trace hot gas within the nebula, while oranges and reds reveal the underlying dust patterns.