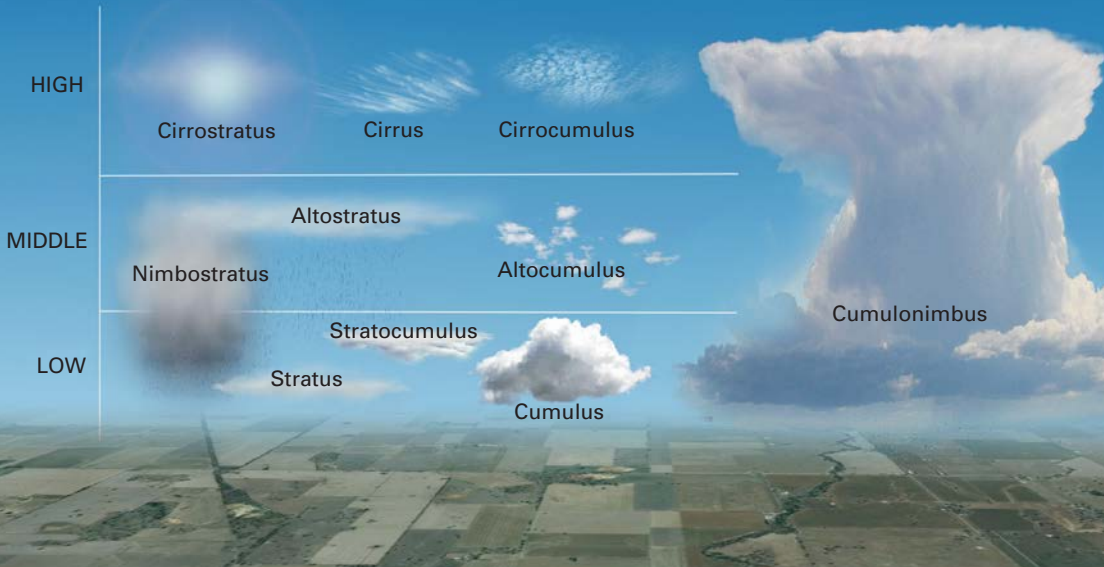




Australian Government  
Bureau of Meteorology

# Cloud Types



## The 10 main types of cloud

The layer cloud types are known as stratiform and are classified as:

- **Stratus (St)** – found in the low levels of the atmosphere, tend to produce a light drizzle.
- **Altostratus (As)** – ('alto' meaning high), found in the middle level, tend to be very good rain producing system for large areas across Australia, particularly inland.
- **Nimbostratus (Ns)** – formed when altostratus undergoes further vertical development, allowing the cloud to hold more moisture, and causing the cloud base to lower and produce heavier rainfall; also appears darker in colour.
- **Cirrostratus (Cs)** – found in the higher levels of the atmosphere, white and wispy, and made of ice crystals. We often get a lot of halo activity with cirrostratus cloud, with the ice crystals refracting light around the moon and the sun.

The clumpy cloud, when in the lower part of the atmosphere, is classified as cumulus cloud:

- **Cumulus (Cu)** – low level cloud which tends to produce short duration, fairly intense rainfall that is often very localised, meaning that rain falling

at your house might not be falling a kilometre up the road.

- **Stratocumulus (Sc)** – found in the lower levels, a blend between stratiform and cumuliform cloud and taking on appearances from both these cloud types, may produce drizzle.
- **Alto cumulus (Ac)** – found in the middle levels, looks like sheep in the sky, may produce light showers.
- **Cirrocumulus (Cc)** – small, rippled, higher level cloud, does not produce precipitation.
- **Cumulonimbus (Cb)** – the largest cloud of all, forms in the lower layer of the atmosphere but extends through all three layers right to the top of the atmosphere. Also known as thunderstorm cloud, producing thunder and lightning.

Some of the more visually spectacular cloud happens very high up in the atmosphere, and is classified as cirrus cloud:

- **Cirrus (Ci)** – formed of ice crystals moving very quickly through the atmosphere, occurring at temperatures around -40°C to -60°C, does not produce precipitation.