

Ho Ho Hold On... Before You Buy That Trash Scope!

Admit it. Christmas (and other holidays) are around the corner, and you're salivating for a scope.

Warning: there are telescopes, and there are what we amateur astronomers refer to as "trash scopes." Let me save you from an anti-climatic heartache later when you realize what you've bought is unusable.



BAS VP Zoë Kessler nerds it up with gifts from around \$2 – \$500, including Santa-hat accessory dollar-store headlamp with interchangeable white and red lights, and of course the obligatory subscription to SkyNews Magazine – a great gift for amateur astronomers at any stage.

[Here are the most important guidelines.](#)

1) Do NOT buy a telescope

Yup, that's right. If you are a total beginner, try using a good pair of binoculars first to familiarize yourself with the sky, for example a mid-priced pair of Celestron "Cavalry" (12 X 70) binoculars. Approximately \$150 at Canadian Tire, and as of this writing, on sale for half-price (around \$75). Advantages: light, manageable, rubber-coated. According to BAS President John Hlynialuk, they're great for looking at the Moon or clusters like the Pleiades, or objects like Orion's Belt and M31.

They also offer “Wonderful views of Milky Way stars. Just lie back and sweep through the heavens! The North America Nebula is best seen through binos! (and so are comets when they get bright enough).” Stick to brand names for binoculars. Check out [K-W Telescope](#) and local camera stores. For more information, see [SkyNews Magazine’s](#) many articles on choosing binoculars for stargazing.

2) Focus on eyepieces, stability

Less is more. Cheaper telescopes with tons of eyepieces, gadgets, and gizmos seem to offer value for your money, but the opposite is true. Look for a known name in telescopes (Meade, Celestron, Sky-Watcher to name a few). Your main considerations are: excellent eyepieces and a stable mount. Cheap telescopes are like a cheap drunk: wobbly, unsteady, and unreliable.

3) Buy a used scope

Amateur astronomers often upgrade their equipment. My second scope was bought from a trusted astronomy buddy. I’d already used it many times, so I knew exactly what I was getting. When she upgraded, I had first dibs (and a good price) on a scope I already loved.

Are you buying a gift for an astronomer friend?

Consider these:

1) Warm, snuggly, hooded jacket

Astronomy knows no season. Wait – that’s not entirely true. The cold, crisp nights of fall and winter can offer some of the best stargazing opportunities – with one serious drawback: it’s (!\$#_*&! cold! Show your beloved astronomy nut that you care about them (albeit while simultaneously being baffled by their addiction) and help them survive those dark, frosty evenings under clear skies.

2) Tim Horton’s gift card

If your astronomy buddy lives in Canada, chances are they’re picking up a hot coffee en route to the observatory. In the astronomy world, “double double” takes on a whole new meaning: double the benefits of helping out on a cold night of observing. A hot drink provides something to warm up your hands, and caffeine to keep you awake while pursuing your passion.

3) Thermal undies

Yes, there’s a theme here. Astronomers are hot for their hobby. Not even frigid Canadian winters can cool their passion. Help them to practice safe astronomy!

Also, check out the BAS events calendar to hook up with BAS members. We’re always happy to answer all your questions, including tips about buying your first scope or upgrading to a more powerful one. See [COMING EVENTS](#) for a detailed list.

Happy Shopping and Happy Stargazing!