

The Basic Questions about Model Rocketry

What is it? Model rocketry is a safe and fun hobby/sport/recreation/educational tool.

What are they made of? Model rockets are made of lightweight materials such as paper, wood, rubber, and plastic. They contain very little or no metal.

What powers them? Model rockets are powered by safe, commercially made, solid-fuel motors. The motors are used only once, but the rocket may be launched many times by using a new motor each time. The motors are ignited by an electrical current from a safe distance. You do NOT make your own motors. You do NOT use fuses. Model rockets are NOT fireworks!

How do you get the rocket back? All model rockets are required to have some sort of "recovery system" to bring the rocket gently back to earth. Usually this will be a parachute or streamer. However, some rockets will glide back just like the space shuttle or spin down like a helicopter.

How high and fast can a model rocket go? Because model rocket motors come in different sizes and different "powers", a model rocket can go to different altitudes (heights) depending upon which motor you put in it. On a small motor, some rockets may only go up 100 feet, but rockets that use larger motors may go up over 1,000 feet! Some rockets even use several motors in different "stages". A three-stage rocket could go up over 2,000 feet! Most model rockets can travel at several hundred miles per hour. Some advanced model rockets can go faster than the speed of sound!

Is it safe? Modern model rocketry, which started in about 1957, has a proven safety record with well over 500 million launches. All rocketeers must follow the "Model Rocketry Safety Code" as developed by the National Association of Rocketry.

How much room do I need to launch model rockets? For the smallest rockets on the smallest engines, you need a launch site that is at least 50 feet on a side. However, the recommended size goes up quickly. For large model rockets on big engines, you need a site that is at least 500 feet on a side. Most of the time, an open area the size of an athletic field (soccer, football, baseball, etc.) will work fine.

Are rockets hard to build? Model rocket kits come in different skill levels. The rockets at the lowest skill levels are easy to build and don't require any painting. You can probably put one together in less than an hour. As the skill levels go up, the rockets will become more complicated and will require more time and effort to build. For those in a hurry, some pre-built or "ready-to-fly" rockets are available.

How much does it cost to start out in model rocketry? You should buy a "starter set" for between \$20 and \$45. It contains a rocket kit, a launch pad, a launch controller, and enough supplies for a couple of launches. You'll probably spend a few dollars more on glue, some new batteries for the launch controller, and some extra engines and recovery wadding to launch the rocket more times. The launch pad and controller will work for nearly any model rocket you build in the future, so you're set to start a great hobby!