

6.9: The Kepler Mission



The image above shows a size comparison of the exoplanets Kepler-20e and Kepler 20f with Venus and Earth. Image courtesy of NASA/Ames/JPL-Caltech.

The **Kepler Mission** is NASA's first mission capable of finding Earth-size and smaller planets around other stars using an orbiting space telescope. The Kepler Space Telescope has been monitoring 100,000 stars similar to our Sun since its launch in March 2009. The Kepler Space Telescope, named for astronomer Johannes Kepler, looks for planets orbiting stars by looking for changes in a star's brightness.

Kepler's primary mission is to find Earth-size exoplanets. Detecting the massive gas giant exoplanets – called **Super Jupiters** – has been relatively easy with other methods. So the Kepler Space Telescope watches transits and measures the reduction in the star's light due to the planet transiting in front of its star.

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