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phos·pho·rus  (fōs fər-əs)

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n.

1. Symbol P A highly reactive, poisonous, nonmetallic element occurring naturally in phosphates, especially apatite, and existing in three allotropic forms, white (or sometimes yellow), red, and black (or violet). An essential element for biological cells, it is used in safety matches, pyrotechnics, incendiary shells, and fertilizers and to protect metal surfaces from corrosion. Atomic number 15; atomic weight 30.9738; melting point (white) 44.15°C; boiling point 280.5°C; specific gravity (white) 1.82, (red) 2.16, (black) 2.25 to 2.69; valence 3, 4, 5. See [Periodic Table](#).

2. A phosphorescent substance.

3. Phosphorus Astronomy See [Lucifer](#).

[Modern Latin *phosphorus*, substance or organism that emits light, phosphorus, Latin *Phosphorus*, morning star, from Greek *phōsphoros*, bringing light, morning star : *phōs*, light; see **bhā-**¹ [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#) + *-phoros*, -phorous.]

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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