

# The Night Sky

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During the month of April, all of the major planets of the solar system, except Saturn, are clustered near the sun, hence will not be easily viewed. Saturn is at opposition (opposite on the sky with respect to the sun) during the evening of April 3<sup>rd</sup> and morning of April 4<sup>th</sup>. Saturn's rings have been slowly opening up since they were edge-on with respect to the Earth during the summer of 2009. Saturn will rise near sunset during April and set at sunrise, hence will be visible all night, appearing near the bright star Spica in the constellation of Virgo.

In the morning sky, Venus rises 80 minutes before the sun at the beginning of the month and only 60 minutes before the sun at the end of the month. During the last few days of the month, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus, and the moon will be very close together on the sky 30 minutes before sunrise. Unfortunately they will be very low on the eastern horizon and difficult to see to the morning twilight. Note that Jupiter will be in conjunction (directly behind) with the sun on April 6<sup>th</sup>.

On Thursday evening the night of April 7<sup>th</sup>, the crescent moon passes between the Hyades and Pleiades star clusters in Taurus low in the western sky. The moon is at full phase on Sunday, April 17<sup>th</sup>. The full moon in April has many names including the Full Pink Moon (from the herb moss pink, or wild ground phlox, which is one of the earliest widespread flowers of the spring), the Full Spouting Grass Moon, the Egg Moon, and the Full Fish Moon (since some species of fish spawn this time of year). Note that the Easter holiday occurs on the first Sunday, after the first full moon, after the vernal equinox (i.e., first day of spring). Since the full moon in March was the day before the vernal equinox, this year's Easter date, April 24<sup>th</sup>, is one of the latest it can be.

The next free public astronomy open house at the ETSU Powell Observatory will occur on April 9<sup>th</sup> from 8:00 to 10:00 p.m. This marks the last astronomy open house until the fall. At these open houses, the public can view objects in the sky through telescopes and hear talks by faculty of the Physics and Astronomy Department. Note that the open houses are cancelled if the sky is cloudy.

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This article of The Night Sky was written by Dr. Donald G. Luttermoser, Chair, Department of Physics and Astronomy. He can be reached at [lutter@etsu.edu](mailto:lutter@etsu.edu). Astronomy-related information for the public, including a link to the ETSU astronomy open houses, can be found at <http://www.etsu.edu/physics/astronomy.htm>.