

# The Night Sky

## Venus and Mercury Are Alright Tonight

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This slight rewrite of Paul McCartney's 1975 hit "Venus and Mars are alright tonight" aptly describes the western evening sky for the first part of June. Venus and Mercury will be very close together in the evening skies for about an hour after sunset through the first 3 weeks of June. Brilliant Venus will be the first to appear in the darkening twilight about  $10^{\circ}$  above the horizon about one-half hour after sunset. Then as the sky darkens, Mercury will then become visible a few degrees above Venus throughout the first 2 weeks of June. This will be the best evening apparition of Mercury this year from our latitude. Mercury will then sink below Venus during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of June. Both of these planets will be very low on the sky within an hour after sunset, so you will need an unobstructed, flat western horizon to see them.

Jupiter has left the evening sky as it is current behind the sun with respect to the earth. While Venus and Mercury are putting on a celestial show in the western sky, Saturn will be visible in the southeastern sky during the early evening. As the evening progresses, Saturn will climb higher as the earth rotates, but will remain low in the southern sky. Saturn lies east of the bright star Spica and forms a nice pairing with this star. Mars will be difficult to spot in the morning twilight, but as the summer progresses, faint Mars should be visible in the eastern sky an hour before the sun rises.

The crescent moon will be very close to Venus and Mercury on June 10<sup>th</sup> and should be a very beautiful sight. The moon is at full phase at 7:32 a.m. EDT on the morning of June 23<sup>rd</sup>. Meanwhile on June 21<sup>st</sup>, the sun is at its highest point in the northern sky, the summer solstice, at 1:04 a.m. EDT. This marks the beginning of summer in the northern hemisphere and is the day with the longest amount of daylight hours for the year in the northern hemisphere.

The ETSU Powell Observatory open houses are on hiatus for the summer. They will resume in the fall.

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