

The Night Sky

Venus Among the Taurus Star Clusters

Venus and Jupiter continue to dominate the evening sky. As Venus continues to gain altitude in the western sky after sunset, it will pass between the two closest star clusters to the Earth, the Hyades and the Pleiades, from April 11th through the 15th. During the last week of April, planet Mercury joins Venus in the western sky after sunset. This will be the best evening appearance of Mercury for the year. Some may be still able to spot Mars in the bright evening sky just above the north-western horizon one-half hour after sunset, though you may need binoculars to see it in the bright evening twilight. On the evening of April 21st, a thin crescent moon will be just to the left of Venus. In addition, the bright red giant star Aldebaran will be just below the moon forming a spectacular triangle with Venus and the moon.

Jupiter beams brightly and nearly overhead throughout the evening hours. Over the next few months, the separation on the sky between our two brightest planets, Jupiter and Venus, will be decreasing until they reach a close conjunction with each other on July 1st.

As Saturn approaches its May 23rd opposition, this ringed planet brightens, rivaling the 4th brightest star in the night sky, Arcturus, in brightness. Saturn rises around 10 p.m. by mid-month and will appear low in the southern sky throughout the night. Speaking of Arcturus, this red giant star is one of my favorite stars in the sky since its first appearance in the evening sky reminds me that spring is on its way.

The moon will be full early in the morning on April 4th. This month's full moon will give rise to a lunar eclipse. Unfortunately totality will just be reached as the moon is setting from our location. However if you get up before sunrise on that day, you can watch the moon get deeper and deeper into the Earth's shadow as dawn approaches.

The ETSU Powell Observatory open houses are on hiatus until September. Later this summer, the 2015-2016 schedule for our Astronomy open houses can be found on the web at <http://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/observatory/default.aspx>.

This month's Night Sky was written by Dr. Donald G. Luttermoser, Chair of the Department of Physics and Astronomy at ETSU. He can be reached at lutter@mail.etsu.edu. Astronomy-related information for the public, including a link to the ETSU Powell Observatory, can be found at <http://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/outreach/astronomy.aspx>.