

# The Night Sky

## Jupiter Dominates the Evening Sky

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During the early evening hours an hour after sunset in May, go out and observe Mars low in the western sky. This will be the last full month in 2017 that Mars will be visible in the evening sky. Mars is currently located in the constellation of Taurus and passes about 6 degrees north (upper right) of the bright red giant star Aldebaran between May 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. At the beginning of May, Mars sets about 2 hours after the sun, and by month's end, it sets 1 hour and 20 minutes after sunset. On May 26<sup>th</sup>, Mars will be located just to the upper right of a slender crescent moon. You should also be able to spot equally bright Beta Tauri just to the upper right of Mars on this date.

On clear evenings in May, Jupiter will be the brightest object in the night sky when the moon is not visible. This king of the planets will be well up in the eastern sky as the sky darkens after sunset and will be visible throughout most of the night this month. Jupiter is currently in the constellation of Virgo, sitting some 10 degrees to the northeast (upper left) of the bright star Spica.

If you are still out and about one-half hour before midnight, look to the southeast horizon to catch the rising of Saturn, the ringed planet. Saturn continues its slow movement in the southern sky moving from the constellation of Sagittarius into Ophiuchus, the serpent bearer constellation. Although not officially listed as a zodiac constellation, the ecliptic (the plane of the earth's orbit projected on the sky) does run through the southern part of this constellation between Scorpius and Sagittarius. As such, the planets do pass through this constellation as they circle the sky. By the end of the month, Saturn rises around 9:30 p.m. EDT.

We now have to wait until the early morning, just prior to morning twilight to catch our next bright planet. Scanning the east-northeast horizon at this time, Venus rises with its dazzling brightness. As a matter of fact, Venus reaches its greatest morning brightness for this year on April 30<sup>th</sup>. Note that our other inner planet, Mercury, will be lost in the solar glare and not be visible this month.

The moon will be at full phase on May 10<sup>th</sup> at 5:43 p.m. EDT. Many Native Americans called the full moon of May as the Full Flower Moon, since flowers are abundant everywhere during this time of year.

The ETSU Powell Observatory open houses are on hiatus until September. Later this summer, the 2017-2018 schedule for our Astronomy open houses can be found on the web at <http://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/observatory/default.php>.

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<http://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/> by selecting the Public Outreach pull down menu at the top of this web page.