

# The Night Sky

## Double Planet in the Morning Sky

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This past month of March saw a close conjunction of Venus and Mercury in the evening sky. In April, we get another close conjunction, this time with Saturn and Mars in the morning sky. These planets both rise around 2:15 a.m. EDT and will be fairly close together in the sky in northern Sagittarius throughout the first week of April. On April 2<sup>nd</sup>, Saturn and Mars will have their smallest separation (little over one-degree of arc apart) from each other. As the month progresses, fast moving Mars will move farther and farther eastward from the ringed planet. On the morning of April 7<sup>th</sup>, a waning gibbous moon will be very close to this pair, just to the northwest of Saturn. Both of these planets are currently about the same brightness, though Mars will be slightly brighter and have a reddish tint.

Venus continues to shine brightly low in the western sky an hour after sunset. Venus is easy to spot since it will be the brightest 'point-like' object in the evening sky. On the evening of April 24<sup>th</sup>, Venus will lie just to the southeast of the Pleiades star cluster in the constellation of Taurus. It should make for a beautiful sight.

Our largest planet, Jupiter, is the next bright planet to rise about 3 hours after sunset at the beginning of the month on the southeaster horizon. By the end of the month, the king of the planets rises a little more than half an hour after sunset. Jupiter will be joined with the Full Moon on the evening of April 29<sup>th</sup>. It exactly reaches full phase at 8:58 p.m. EDT on that evening.

Some of you might be able to catch our innermost planet Mercury low above the eastern horizon one-half hour before sunrise during the last week of April. Binoculars will make things easier to spot this planet in the bright morning twilight.

The next free public astronomy open house at the ETSU Powell Observatory will occur on Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup> from 8 to 10 p.m. 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. Make sure you dress warmly since you will be standing outside to look through our telescopes. This marks our last public open house at the Observatory before the summer hiatus. Further information about these open houses and directions to the observatory can be found on the web at <http://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/observatory/default.aspx>.

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