

The Night Sky

Jupiter Reappears in the Morning Sky

Our sister planet Venus is shining spectacularly in the evening sky this month! It is the brightest “star-like” object in the evening sky appearing high in the northwestern sky. Venus is currently moving through the constellation of Gemini. There are currently two naked-eye planets in the evening this month. Besides Venus, the red-planet Mars is still plainly visible. On the evening of May 15th, Mars forms a straight line with the two brightest stars in Gemini, Pollux and Castor, with each celestial object equally spaced. Venus sits below this threesome. This is a good time to appreciate the movement of the nearer planets against the background stars. With Pollux and Castor as a reference, watch how quickly both Mars and Venus move each night you view them. This will really make you appreciate the dynamics of the solar system!

On the nights of May 22-24, watch the even faster motion of the Moon as it approaches Venus on the 22nd. The waxing crescent Moon sits just to the lower-left of Pollux on the 23rd, and positioned just above Mars on the 24th. These 3 conjunctions with the Moon should make a beautiful site worth photographing!

After its April conjunction with the Sun, Jupiter reappears in the morning sky by mid-May. On the morning of May 17th, Jupiter has a very close conjunction with the Moon, with the two being less than a degree apart on this date. Unfortunately, this will be a difficult conjunction to see, since this pair rises only 70 minutes before the Sun and will be awash in the bright morning twilight. By month’s end, Jupiter will be easier to spot in the morning twilight, rising about two hours before the Sun. If you have an unobstructed eastern horizon, you might be able to spot planet Mercury to the lower left of Jupiter, sitting slightly above the horizon 30 minutes before sunrise. This will be a tough sighting since our innermost planet will be residing in very bright twilight. A pair of binoculars may help you spot this elusive planet.

We have one more planet visible in the morning sky, the ringed-planet Saturn. Saturn rises 4 hours before the Sun and is currently in the dim constellation of Aquarius. As a result, it is the brightest object in that part of the sky.

The full Moon of May will occur on the 5th at 1:34 p.m. EDT. Many Native Americans called this month’s full Moon the Full Flower Moon since flowers are in full bloom in the northern states during May.

The ETSU Powell Observatory open houses are on hiatus until September. Later this summer, the 2023-2024 schedule for our Astronomy open houses can be found on the web at <https://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/observatory/starparty.php>.

There will be a planetarium show on May 11th at 7:00 p.m. at the ETSU Planetarium in Hutcheson Hall. A location map of the Planetarium on the ETSU campus can be found on the web at <https://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/outreach/planetarium.php> for further information.

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