

The Night Sky

Venus and Jupiter Dominate the Evening Sky

I'm sure many of you have been noticing a luminous "star" in the western sky getting higher and higher as it moves towards the north with each progressive evening. This "star" is our sister planet, Venus, the brightest "point-like" object in the night sky. As the month of April progresses, Venus become brighter as it continues its northward trek. On the evening of April 18th, a thin crescent Moon will be just to the right of this brilliant planet.

As the evening twilight fades, look virtually straight up to see the second brightest planet, Jupiter, sitting high overhead. It makes a nice triangle with Gemini's two brightest stars, Castor and Pollux.

The rest of the naked-eye planets, Mercury, Mars, and Saturn, have been lost in the solar glare, but now start to emerge in the morning sky. On the morning of April 15th, the thin-waning crescent Moon will be just above Mars and Mercury, sitting low above the eastern horizon ½ hour before sunrise. However due to the bright twilight, this conjunction will be impossible to see with just your eyes – you will need binoculars to see these planets and the Moon on this date. Saturn will still be tough to spot in the morning sky due to its proximity to the Sun for most of the month. By May 1st, Saturn should be available via binoculars ½ hour before sunrise.

The Moon will reach full phase on April Fool's Day, April 1st, at 9:11 p.m. EDT. The April's Full Moon is known as the Full Pink Moon by many Native Americans, named for the early spring bloom of ground phlox. Every year, Easter falls on a different date. Have you ever wondered why? It has to do with the phase of the Moon. Easter is observed on the first Sunday following the first Full Moon that occurs on or after the vernal equinox (i.e., the first day of spring).

On April 25th, the waxing gibbous Moon will occult (pass in front of) Regulus, the brightest star in the constellation of Leo the Lion. Look to the southeastern sky after sunset to view this occultation. Regulus disappears at about 8:34 p.m. EDT on the dark limb of the Moon and returns at view at the bright limb around 9:59 p.m. EDT. Let's hope for a clear sky on this date!

The ETSU Powell Observatory open houses are on hiatus until September. Later this summer, the 2026-2027 schedule for our Astronomy open houses can be found on the web at <https://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/observatory/starparty.php>.

However, the planetarium show will continue through the month of May. The next planetarium show will be on April 16th 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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