

The Night Sky

Close Conjunction between the Moon and Mercury

On Wednesday, February 18th, 2026, the Moon and the innermost planet to the Sun, Mercury, will have an extremely close conjunction -- they will nearly be "touching" each other shortly after sunset. You'll need binoculars to catch this close pairing, since the Moon will just be a day past New Moon, hence will be a very slight crescent shape in the bright western twilight. On this date, look towards the West-Southwest horizon 30 minutes after sunset to spot this pair just 10-degrees above the horizon. Make sure this horizon is unobstructed to catch this conjunction -- Mercury will be just to the top of the dark side of the Moon. Finally note that if you look closely, you will also see brilliant planet Venus below the Moon-Mercury pair, just a few degrees above the horizon.

On the following night, Saturn will be about 4 degrees to the lower left of the waxing crescent Moon. A couple of nice planetary conjunctions with the Moon on back-to-back nights.

On the evening of the 23rd, high in the southwest, the almost-first-quarter Moon gleams right next to the Pleiades star cluster in the constellation of Taurus. Four days later, the Moon makes a close pass to the King of the Planets, Jupiter.

The Moon will reach full phase on February 1st at 5:09 p.m. EST. The February Full Moon is known as the Full Snow Moon. The explanation behind February's Full Moon name is a fairly straightforward one: it's known as the Snow Moon due to the typically heavy snowfall that occurs in February. On average, February is the United States' snowiest month, according to data from the National Weather Service.

A free astronomy open house takes place on Saturday, February 21st from 8 to 10 pm at the campus Harry D. Powell Observatory. 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. Further information about these open houses and directions to the observatory can be found on the web at <https://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/observatory/starparty.php>.

For those of you who would rather explore the night sky indoors, this month's planetarium show will be on February 19th 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.

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@etsu.edu. Any students wishing

to pursue a career in Physics or Astronomy are encouraged to contact him at this email address. Astronomy-related information for the public, including a link to the ETSU Powell Observatory, can be found at <https://www.etsu.edu/cas/physics/> by selecting the Public Outreach pull down menu on the lower-left side of this web page.