

STAR TRAK for November

November 3 2008



Venus

(PhysOrg.com) -- Venus and Jupiter, the brightest planets in the sky, will steadily approach each other during November as if drawn by their mutual brilliance. Finally they will have a spectacular encounter low in the southwest at month's end, against the background of the constellation Sagittarius the Archer.

Jupiter will be low in the southwest at dusk, getting lower each week. Our turbulent atmosphere will obscure much of its detail, but its four bright moons will still be visible with binoculars.

Far to Jupiter's lower right (west) at the beginning of the month will be

Venus, a dazzling white "evening star." Each day the two will be closer as evening twilight fades, with Venus rising to meet the descending giant. Their meeting on Nov. 29 will be higher in the sky and much easier to see than their previous encounter in February.

Saturn followed the bright star Regulus up into the eastern sky around 3 a.m. local time on Nov. 1 and almost three hours earlier by month's end. Saturn's famous rings are now tilted closer to edgewise than they have been in more than a decade, considerably reducing its brightness.

Mars and Mercury will be out of sight during November, hidden in the glare of the sun.

Meteor showers

The annual Leonid meteor shower will peak on the nights of Nov. 17-18, just four days past full moon. The combination of bright moonlight and light pollution will eliminate all but the brightest Leonid fireballs this time. These meteors appear to radiate from the constellation Leo the Lion. They are actually caused by streams of fast-moving dust particles from Comet Tempel-Tuttle.

Watch for meteors after midnight local time as sickle-shaped Leo gets higher in the east. The farther Leo climbs above the horizon, the more meteors there will be all over the sky. The bright star Regulus is part of Leo and can serve as a marker for the radiant, the point from which the meteors appear to come.

Another meteor shower, the Southern Taurids, will peak before dawn on Nov. 5. These meteors will seem to come from the constellation Taurus the Bull, whose bright orange star Aldebaran is easy to spot. Watch to the west between midnight and dawn, after the moon has set.

More information about meteor showers is available from the American Meteor Society at: www.amsmeteors.org/showers.html .

Light pollution

Satellite imagery showing the extent of light pollution can be viewed at earth.google.com , which has a free program called Google Earth that can be downloaded. You can locate patches of darker sky nearest your home, as well as the roads to reach them.

Moon phases

The moon will be at first quarter on Nov. 5, full on Nov. 13, at third quarter on Nov. 19 and new on Nov. 27.

Provided by

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