

STAR TRAK for May

May 4 2010



Venus. Photo courtesy of NASA.

(PhysOrg.com) -- After sunset each evening in May, look to the west-northwest to see the planet Venus as a beautiful "evening star," the brightest point of light in the sky.

Venus will appear at about the same elevation all month, remaining visible until after 10 p.m. local daylight saving time. It will begin the month in the constellation Taurus the Bull, whose bright star Aldebaran will be just below the brilliant planet on May 3. By the last week of the month, Venus will be passing into the [constellation Gemini](#) the Twins. The crescent moon will be close to Venus in evening twilight on May 15, making an attractive scene for photographers.

As evening twilight fades, Mars and Saturn will come into view in the southern sky. At the start of the month, orange Mars will be about halfway between yellow Saturn and Venus. This separation will shrink as the month passes, and by month's end Mars will be close to the bright star Regulus in the [constellation Leo](#) the Lion.

Look higher in the south to find Saturn in the constellation Virgo the Maiden, with the bright white star Spica to the planet's lower left. Saturn will be visible nearly all night during May. Near the end of the month, Saturn's rings will be at their minimum tilt toward Earth for 2010, causing the planet to appear about as faint as it can ever be.

As Saturn sets in the west, Jupiter will rise in the east for viewers at mid-northern latitudes. That will be around the start of morning twilight in early May, but about 3 a.m. local time by month's end. The giant planet will be easy to identify, dominating its part of the sky until it is overwhelmed by the brightening dawn.

Mercury will be close to the eastern horizon during May and difficult to find in bright morning twilight.

Meteor shower

This month, Earth will encounter a stream of dust left behind in space by Comet Halley, causing the Eta Aquarid [meteor shower](#) that will peak before dawn on May 6. The shower will be active for a few days before and after the peak as well. The meteors will appear to come from a point called the radiant in the constellation Aquarius, which will rise in the east about two hours before the start of morning twilight. The higher this point is above the horizon, the more meteors will be visible. The moon will be at third quarter on May 6, so meteor-watching may be spoiled by bright moonlight. Observers may see around 20 meteors per hour.

Moon phases

The moon will be at third quarter on May 6, new on May 13, at first quarter on May 20 and full on May 27.

Provided by Indiana University

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