

Saturn only visible planet through the month of April

April 1 2011



Saturn. Credit: NASA

(PhysOrg.com) -- For those who enjoy viewing clusters of planets, the evening sky in April may be a bit disappointing. Saturn will be the only planet visible for most of the night, until the sky starts to brighten toward dawn.

Saturn will be well above the southeastern horizon as darkness falls, one

of the first "stars" to appear. The bright yellow planet will be opposite the sun in our [sky](#) on the night of April 3-4 ("at opposition"), and it will gleam at its biggest and brightest for the year. It will remain near its peak of visibility for most of the night throughout April. The best views through a telescope will be when it is highest in the southern sky in the middle of the night. Saturn will outshine nearby Spica, the brightest star in the constellation Virgo the Maiden. Visit saturn.jpl.nasa.gov/home/index.cfm for the latest news and images from the [Cassini spacecraft](#) orbiting Saturn.

Saturn's biggest moon, Titan, will be due south of the planet on April 1 and 17, and due north on April 9 and 25.

Venus will rise in the east-southeast about 80 minutes before the sun on April 1 and an hour before the sun on April 30. It will be so dazzlingly bright that it will be easy to find above the eastern horizon.

For observers at mid-northern latitudes, Mercury, Jupiter and Mars will rise shortly before the sun after the middle of April, but they will be so close to the eastern horizon in the brightening sky that they will be difficult to find even with binoculars or a telescope.

Light pollution

A great deal of energy and money is wasted on inefficient, improperly directed outdoor lighting. To help call attention to this problem of [light pollution](#), the International Dark-Sky Association encourages people in the United States to turn off unnecessary outside lighting during National Dark-Sky Week. This year NDSW will be from April 1 to April 8. More information is available at [www.darksky.org/index.php?opti ... &view=article&id=579](http://www.darksky.org/index.php?opti...&view=article&id=579) .

Meteor shower

The Lyrid meteor shower will peak on the night of April 22-23. For observers in North America, 10 to 20 meteors per hour should be visible in a clear, dark sky around midnight, before the moon rises. The meteors can appear anywhere in the sky, but they will seem to come from a point called the radiant in the constellation Lyra the Harp, which gives the shower its name. Lyra's bright white star Vega will be almost at the radiant, and the meteor count should be highest when Vega is well above the eastern horizon. Try using a tree or building to block the moon's glow after it rises around 1 a.m. local time.

Moon phases

The moon will be new on April 3, at first quarter on April 11, full on April 17 and at third quarter on April 24.

Provided by Indiana University

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