

Planets align in the morning sky (w/ video)

May 10 2011, By Dr. Tony Phillips

Have you ever woken up at the crack of dawn, shuffled to the kitchen counter for your first cup of joe, only to discover that you're out of coffee beans?

Cruel.

This week it's not a problem, because there's something to open your eyes even better than coffee. Four bright [planets](#) are aligning in the morning sky.

Look out any east-facing window about a half hour before [sunrise](#). If you have a clear view of the [horizon](#), you'll see [Mercury](#), Venus, Mars and [Jupiter](#) clustered together in a patch of sky less than 10° wide. If you wanted to, you could hide them all behind your outstretched hand—but don't. The view is too good.

The best morning is May 11th, when Venus and Jupiter converge to form a tight pair only 1/2° apart. (Now you can hide them using no more than one finger.) Venus and Jupiter are so bright you might think you've witnessed a double supernova beaming through the morning twilight. But, no, it's just the two brightest planets in our own solar system.

Keep an eye on Venus in particular. As the sun rises and the sky fills with morning blue, the Goddess of Love does not fade away. You can actually see Venus in broad daylight if you know where to look.

May 11th is just the beginning. Throughout the month, the quartet of

worlds will rearrange themselves on a daily basis, forming different shapes in the pre-dawn sky.

On May 13th, for instance, Mercury, Venus and Jupiter form a bright celestial triangle--almost equilateral. It's a geometry lesson before breakfast. On May 20th, a new triangle will appear. This time the vertices are Mars, Venus, and Mercury. Observing tip: Mars is not as bright as the others. Binoculars may be required to help you find and fully appreciate the red planet in morning twilight.

The show comes to an end on May 30th when an exquisite crescent Moon joins the four planets for a Grand Finale--five heavenly lights dotting the eastern [sky](#) all at once.

What a way to begin the day.

Provided by Science@NASA

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