

Evening planets: Venus shines at mag. -4 well up in W at dusk, and sets 3 to 3½ hours after sunset.

Shifting over 1.1° daily against the stars from Aries into Taurus, Venus passes within 3° south of the Pleiades Apr. 11, and then widely north of the Hyades and Aldebaran Apr. 16-20. Beginning Apr. 18, Venus is farther N than the Sun ever gets, and will set farthest north in 2nd week of May. Saturn in western Leo is very high at dusk, drifting from SE through S to SSW as month progresses. Actually Saturn barely moves against the stars, staying nearly 12° W of Regulus all month while fading from mag. +0.2 to +0.4. In April's third week, Saturn's rings are tipped 15.4° from edgewise, the most "open" view we'll get until 5½ years from now, in the autumn of 2012. This is an excellent time to view Saturn through a telescope. Adjacent to the SE limb of Saturn, can you notice a "gap" in the ring when it goes behind the planet? It is the shadow of the planet cast upon the ring. For the next few weeks, Saturn looks especially 3-dimensional, because sunlight is illuminating the planet from a direction 6° away from our line of sight. Jupiter, in closing days of April, rises just before Venus sets. Then you can see Venus-Saturn-Jupiter simultaneously.

Morning planets: Jupiter of mag. -2.3 to -2.5 is the bright morning "star" in S to SSW at dawn. The giant begins retrograde on Apr. 6, when it pauses in Ophiuchus 11° ENE (upper left) of Antares. In next four months until early August, watch Jupiter go 10° west, ending 5° N of Antares. Mars brightens to mag. +1.0, low in ESE at dawn.

The Moon passes widely S of Jupiter in predawn on Easter Sunday, April 8, then hopscoches past Mars at dawn at the end of that week, April 13 and 14. Have you ever seen a Moon within 24 hours of New? Observers in western U.S. and SW Canada will have a chance to see an extremely young Moon on Tues. Apr. 17. Begin searching with binoculars 20-25 minutes after sunset. It won't be seen from East Coast because it will be within 7.5° of the Sun and less than 13 hours old. From Louisiana to Michigan, the Moon's visibility will be marginal, at an age of about 13 hours and still within 8 degrees of the Sun. Farther west, from the West Coast of the U.S., the Moon's age will be 15-16 hours, with the hairline lunar crescent about 9 degrees from the Sun and possibly visible with unaided eye. From Hawaii, the Moon will be 17 hours old, about 10° from the Sun, and likely to be seen with unaided eye. By Apr. 19, Moon climbs nearly up to Venus (try to spot the planet before sunset). On the evenings of Apr. 24 and 25, Moon approaches Saturn, then Regulus, resulting in an occultation both nights. The occ'n of Regulus by leading dark edge of the Moon on night of Apr. 24 is visible from the West Coast of the U.S. For specifics, visit <http://www.lunar-occultations.com> in May-July issues of Sky

Calendar: Venus and Jupiter at their best of year. Four planets visible at dusk. Asteroid Vesta at its brightest, naked-eye! Venus closes in on Saturn for the best planet pairing of the year. Venus draws close to Earth, showing a crescent phase, even in binoculars. Lunar occultations of Pleiades and Regulus. We appreciate your subscriptions!

Sunday April 29, just after morning twilight begins: 6th-mag Uranus 0.7° N (upper left) of Mars and 0.4° UL of 4.2-mag Phi Aquarii.

Monday April 30

Morning: Mars and Jupiter 90° apart.

Evening: Spica closely above Moon. Jupiter rises before Venus sets. Catch them 2° above opposite horizons!

This issue may be reprinted for free distribution on Astronomy Day.

Planetarium business office:

(517) 355-4676

Skywatcher's Diary on World Wide Web:

<http://www.pa.msu.edu/abrams/diary.html>

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An aid to enjoying the changing sky

Use this scale to measure angular distances between objects on diagrams below.



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>April 1-7, one hour before sunrise</p> <p>Jupiter</p> <p>Theta Ophiuchi</p> <p>Antares</p> <p>Scorpion's tail</p> <p>Sat 7</p> <p>Fri 6</p> <p>Thurs 5</p> <p>Alpha Librae</p> <p>Mars 67° E (LL) of Jupiter Apr 1 & 2; compare Apr 30. Jupiter begins retrograde 11.2° ENE of Antares and 3.1° NNW of 3rd-mag Theta Oph on Apr 6.</p> <p>S SSW SW WSW W</p>	<p>April 8-14, one hour before sunrise</p> <p>AQUARIUS</p> <p>Beta</p> <p>CAPRICORNUS</p> <p>Alpha</p> <p>Fri 13</p> <p>Sat 14 Mars Moon</p> <p>Delta (Goat's tail)</p> <p>Thurs 12</p> <p>SE</p> <p>SE</p>	<p>April 15 & 16, 30 minutes before sunrise</p> <p>Old Moon on Mon Apr 16 is very low in bright twilight & hard to see from N states; use binoculars. From S states, Moon is higher, and Mercury might be seen 4°-5° to its LR.</p> <p>Mon 16</p> <p>Sunday 15</p> <p>ESE</p>	<p>April 17, 1½ hours after sunset</p> <p>Look high WSW to W.</p> <p>Near First Qtr Mon 23</p> <p>Castor</p> <p>Pollux</p> <p>Sunday 22</p> <p>Lyrid meteors near peak on night of April 22-23.</p> <p>Sunday April 29, just after morning twilight begins: 6th-mag Uranus 0.7° N (upper left) of Mars and 0.4° UL of 4.2-mag Phi Aquarii.</p> <p>Monday April 30</p> <p>Morning: Mars and Jupiter 90° apart.</p> <p>Evening: Spica closely above Moon. Jupiter rises before Venus sets. Catch them 2° above opposite horizons!</p>	<p>April 1-3, 1½ hours after sunset</p> <p>Full Moon Mon Apr 2 approaches Spica all night</p> <p>Tues Apr 3</p> <p>Virgo</p> <p>Gamma</p> <p>Spica</p> <p>Corvus</p> <p>SE</p>	<p>April 1-3, 1½ hours after sunset</p> <p>Full Moon Mon Apr 2 approaches Spica all night</p> <p>Tues Apr 3</p> <p>Virgo</p> <p>Gamma</p> <p>Spica</p> <p>Corvus</p> <p>SE</p>	<p>April 1-3, 1½ hours after sunset</p> <p>Full Moon Mon Apr 2 approaches Spica all night</p> <p>Tues Apr 3</p> <p>Virgo</p> <p>Gamma</p> <p>Spica</p> <p>Corvus</p> <p>SE</p>
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