

What's in the Sky

April 2023

April 6: Full Moon

The April Full Moon is called the Pink Moon. It gets its name from the blooming of wild phlox, which is one of the first Spring flowers. The Full Moon will rise 7:35 p.m. CST.

April 11: Mercury at Greatest Eastern Elongation

Mercury reaches its farthest distance from the Sun, (greatest elongation). Mercury's orbit is very close to the Sun, which means that most of the time Mercury is very difficult to see because of the Sun's brightness. However, you can observe it for a few days each time it reaches its greatest elongation. The best time to see Mercury is shortly after sunset just above the western horizon.

April 20: New Moon

The New Moon is the best time to star gaze. Spring is galaxy season for astronomers. With a telescope and a clear dark sky, you can see Bode's Galaxy, Cigar Galaxy, Pinwheel Galaxy, Leo Triplet, and the Whirlpool Galaxy from your own back yard.

April 20: Total (Hybrid) Solar Eclipse. Southern Hemisphere

This eclipse is quite unusual and can only be seen from the southern hemisphere. It is a hybrid eclipse which means it will switch back and forth from a total eclipse to an annular (partial) eclipse as it travels along its path.

April 22-23: Lyrids Meteor Shower

Finally, we have a meteor shower with very little interference from the Moon. The Lyrid Meteor Shower runs from April 14 to 30. The best night for viewing is expected to be April 22/23, with peak display during the pre-dawn hours April 23. The Lyrids generally produce 10-20 meteors per hour. The thin crescent Moon will set early in the evening leaving dark skies for what should be an excellent show.

April 23, 24, 25, 26: Conjunctions of the Moon, Venus and Mars

On the 23rd, Venus will be below the crescent Moon in the fading evening twilight. This should be a beautiful sight.

April 24: The Moon is between Mars and Venus. **April 25:** We have a three-way conjunction between Mars to the left, of the crescent Moon and very close to the moon. Venus will be farther below the pair. **April 26:** Mars will now be below the Moon. Mars, the red planet has faded to orange and now over 100 million miles from Earth. It may be a bit difficult to see. Most of these conjunctions should be visible beginning around 9:00 p.m. CST.

The Planets

Mars will be in the night sky and set around midnight. **Saturn** is placed quite low to the east horizon in the pre-dawn skies. **Jupiter and Mercury** will be extremely difficult to see all this month as they are tracking very close to the Sun. Uranus and Neptune will also be difficult to see.

Belt of Venus

Look at the sunset in the West and then spin yourself around to face East. You may notice a band of pink or orange-hued sky with a blueish band underneath. These bands move upward following sunset to form an arch over the sky that slowly fades as night sets in. This phenomenon is known as the "Belt of Venus."