

Text for Tonight's Sky August 2010

Your guide to constellations, deep-sky objects, planets and events.

Tonight's Sky, highlights of the August sky.

AUGUST CONSTELLATIONS:

Stargazing on a hot August night reveals a multitude of wonders in the southern sky.

The center of our Milky Way galaxy lies in the direction of the great constellation Sagittarius, the archer.

This area of the sky overflows with stars, planetary nebulae, star clusters, and bright and dark nebulae.

Look for Sagittarius by finding the group of stars commonly known as the Teapot.

The handle, top and spout are easy to find.

The Milky Way seems to rise out of the teapot's spout.

Lyra, the small harp, lies high in the summer night sky.

Its main star is the great Vega, one of the brightest in the heavens.

Look for Lyra by locating Vega, and then the parallelogram of stars nearby.

Epsilon Lyrae, the bright star near Vega, is actually a quadruple star system, the famous Double-Double.

The bright stars of the summer sky, Vega, Deneb and Altair, make up the summer triangle.

AUGUST DEEP SKY OBJECTS:

Many deep-sky targets reside in this area of the summer night sky.

A quick glance with binoculars reveals five spectacular objects.

The Lagoon Nebula's gas and dust are brilliantly illuminated by the energy of the hot young stars forming inside it.

In the three-lobed Trifid Nebula, dark dust lanes appear etched against the radiance of glowing gas.

The Omega Nebula glows brightly, but we cannot see its hottest stars, embedded deep inside.

Infrared telescopes, peering through the gas and dust, can detect them.

M-22, the third brightest globular cluster of stars, is visible to the unaided eye.

It is also relatively close, only 10,400 light-years distant.

In the parallelogram of Lyra lies the dramatic Ring Nebula.

It is an expanding shell of glowing gas expelled by the dying star at its center.

AUGUST PLANETS:

Mars, Venus, and Saturn congregate on the western horizon at sunset throughout August. Mercury joins them during the first half of the month.

From August 5th to 10th, Mars, Venus, and Saturn bunch up to create a pretty triangle of planets.

Mighty Jupiter climbs above the eastern horizon around midnight and rises high into the hot August night.

AUGUST EVENTS:

An always-anticipated August night sky feature is the Perseid meteor shower.

Look for the meteors during mid-month.

These streaks of light are tiny bits of leftover comet tail, burning up as they enter Earth's atmosphere.

The debris trail, through which Earth passes once a year, was left behind during Comet Swift-Tuttle's multiple visits to the inner solar system.

CREDITS:

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Mythological constellation forms from the *Uranographicarum* by Johannes Hevelius, courtesy United States Naval Observatory

Double-Double in Lyra (Epsilon Lyrae) image courtesy of Joe Jones

M8 and M22 images courtesy of Brad Wallis and Robert Provin

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