

# Tonight's Sky: May 2018

Your guide to constellations, deep-sky objects, planets, and events: Tonight's Sky.

Highlights of the May sky:

At nightfall, Venus hangs like a blazing diamond in the western sky.

A backyard telescope reveals only its sunlight-reflecting clouds, which hide its rocky surface.

A second blazing planet hangs over the southeastern horizon.

Jupiter reaches opposition on May 8. It lies opposite the Sun in our sky, rises at sunset, and is visible all night.

A small telescope shows its cloud bands and its four large moons.

Looking toward the south, we've turned away from the crowded center of our Milky Way Galaxy. Thus, we see farther into the universe.

The large constellation Virgo fills the southern sky in the late evening. One of the zodiacal constellations of ancient times, Virgo honors the life-giving virtues of women.

Using a pair of binoculars, visit the Virgo Cluster of Galaxies. These tiny smudges of light are galaxies, far away from our own Milky Way, each aglow with the light of billions of stars.

The Sombrero Galaxy, M104, lies in the southern part of Virgo. Its dark dust lane makes it look like a large hat, hence its name.

Two smaller constellations lie above Virgo.

Coma Berenices honors a queen who gave her long hair to the gods to ensure her husband's safe return from war. M64, a spiral galaxy, can be found tangled in Berenice's Hair.

Canes Venatici represents the hunting dogs of the gods.

The brightest star in Canes Venatici is Cor Caroli, the Heart of Charles, named for King Charles I of England.

M51, in Canes Venatici, is known as the Whirlpool Galaxy. It is one of the most beautiful face-on spirals in the sky.

By month's end, the planet Saturn is rising in the southeast around midnight.

Mars, growing ever brighter as the year progresses, follows not far behind.

Saturn's iconic rings are visible even in small telescopes.

As Mars gets closer to Earth, large-scale surface details may become visible.

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Just before sunrise during the first part of the month, diminutive Mercury may be seen just above the eastern horizon.

Because it is so small and so close to the rising Sun, spotting Mercury becomes more difficult as the month progresses.

The annual Eta Aquarid meteor shower returns this month. On the night of May 6 to 7, expect to see up to 10 meteors per hour. Look for them shooting from the east after midnight.

The night sky is always a celestial showcase. Explore its wonders from your own backyard.