

Tonight's Sky: 2016

May

Your guide to constellations, deep-sky objects, planets, and events. Tonight's Sky, highlights of the May Sky.

Evening Planets

After nightfall, look high in the southern sky to find the king of planets, Jupiter.

A telescope will reveal Jupiter's cloud bands and a few of its moons.

Mars and Saturn appear low in the southeast late in the evening.

You can get a better view of the planets through a telescope.

Constellations and Deep-Sky Objects

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 Charles 1 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.

Events

The annual Eta Aquarid meteor shower returns this month. On the night of May 4th to May 5th, expect to see up to 10 meteors per hour. Look for them shooting from the east after midnight.

Ending

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