

Tonight's Sky: 2016

December

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

Evening Planets

After the Sun sets on these short December days, you can find Venus and Mars hanging out in the darkening southwestern sky.

The two planets will move closer together as the month progresses.

Constellations and Deep-Sky Objects

Two prominent constellations in the December night sky represent notable individuals of ancient Greek mythology.

The great hero Perseus holds the head of Medusa the Gorgon.

Located in Perseus is M34, an open star cluster about 1,400 light-years away from us.

Open star clusters are groups of young stars that all formed at the same time within a large cloud of dust and gas.

Look for it with the naked eye or with binoculars in a dark sky.

Queen Cassiopeia was punished for her conceit and vanity by being tied to her throne. Cassiopeia's "M" or "W" shape makes this constellation easy to identify.

Eta Cassiopeiae is a wonderful and colorful double star. Use binoculars or a small telescope to discern its gold and blue hues.

M103 in Cassiopeia is a fine open star cluster with a prominent red star near the center. Its fan shape is evident in binoculars.

Lying between Cassiopeia and Perseus is the lovely Double Cluster. This pair of open star clusters is easy to see with binoculars.

The Double Cluster resembles a handful of diamonds scattered on black velvet, with a ruby in between.

Morning Planets

Jupiter rises into the southeastern sky well before the Sun appears.

Aim a telescope at the giant planet to spy its dark cloud bands and a few of its moons.

Events

The mid-December night sky hosts the lovely Geminid meteor shower.

The shower peaks on the night of December 13th to the 14th.

This year, however, a full moon interferes, making dim meteors hard to see.

Ending

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