

Tonight's Sky: 2017

May

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

Evening Planets

After sunset, try to find dim, red Mars low in the western sky.

If you succeed, aim a telescope at the planet to catch a glimpse of its features.

Bright Jupiter will be much easier to spot, high in the southern sky.

A telescope will reveal the giant planet's cloud bands and some of its moons.

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.

Morning Planets

Saturn rises by midnight and spends the morning hours shining in the southern sky.

Its rings are easy to see in a small telescope.

Venus appears in the eastern sky about an hour before sunrise.

Use a telescope to check out its crescent phase.

Events

The annual Eta Aquarid meteor shower returns this month. On the night of May 4th to 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.