

Tonight's Sky: 2017

October

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

Evening Planets

Saturn is the highlight of early evenings in October.

Find it shining in the southwestern sky, then use a telescope to spy its beautiful rings.

Constellations and Deep-Sky Objects

Pegasus, the great winged horse of Greek mythology, prances across the autumn night sky. His body is denoted by a large area of stars known as the "Great Square."

Pegasus hosts 51-Pegasi, the first Sun-like star known to have an extrasolar planet.

The brightest corner of the Great Square, Alpheratz, is also the brightest star in the constellation Andromeda. In Greek mythology, this princess was chained to a rock near the sea to appease a sea monster.

Within Andromeda's boundaries, look for M31, the Andromeda Galaxy, an island of billions of stars. On a clear, dark night it appears as a faint smudge of light.

Approximately 2.5 million light-years away, M31 is the closest spiral galaxy to our own Milky Way Galaxy and the most distant object you can see with your eyes alone. Binoculars and small telescopes reveal M31's glowing nucleus and spiral arms.

A smaller companion galaxy, M110, appears as a faint spot near the large galaxy.

The Andromeda Galaxy is slowly pulling in, and will eventually consume, another one of its small companion galaxies, M32.

Morning Planets

In early October, Mars and Venus rise together in the eastern sky before dawn.

The two planets appear to converge on the morning of October 5th but slowly move apart as the month goes on.

Events

The Orionid meteor shower peaks on the night of October 21st to the 22nd.

After midnight, look to the east, where the constellation Orion is rising.

Every few minutes you may spy a tiny remnant of Halley's Comet burning up high in the atmosphere.

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Ending

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