

February Skies

Venus will continue to dominate the early evening hours as it climbs a little higher in the southwestern skies. At magnitude -3.9, this dazzler should be very easy to spot as it climbs to about 19 degrees above the horizon. It is so bright that you should be able to pick it out right at sunset! Viewers with small telescopes should see a very bright, nearly round ball.

For those with telescopes, Venus can also be your guide to finding the 6th magnitude planet Uranus! The dim planet will lie about 7 tenths of a degree north of Venus at about 7 PM on the 7th of this month. Normally hard to find, this may be a great chance to add Uranus to your planet viewing.

Mercury continues to be visible for about the first two weeks of the month. On February 7th it reaches maximum elongation from the Sun, shining at magnitude -0.7. While this is nearly 3 magnitudes dimmer than Venus, you should have no trouble finding it about 6 degrees lower and to the right of Venus.

On February 10th, Saturn reaches opposition from the Sun. This means it will rise in the east just after sunset and be visible all night long. Still found in the constellation Leo it is moving slowly but steadily westward (retrograde motion) towards the constellation of Cancer. Tilted at an angle of 14 degrees, Saturn's rings will offer a good view to those with small telescopes.

Jupiter is still an early morning object rising at 3:30 AM at the beginning of the month and at 2 AM by month's end. Due to its southerly declination it will appear to be rather low in the southeastern sky. However, at magnitude -1.9, nearly six times as bright as Saturn, Jupiter, the "King" of planets, should be pretty easy to see.

During the month Mars will rise low in the east-southeast about one and a half hours before sunrise. At magnitude 1.4 it will appear as a red spec and most likely will require binoculars to see.

The Moon will be full on the 2nd, last quarter on the 10th, new on the 17th and first quarter on the 24th.

Jon Spargo
New Mexico Tech Astronomy Club
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