

October Skies

With planets becoming scarce in the evening hours we'll start off this month talking about the Moon. The "Harvest Moon" is often defined as the full Moon of September. The true definition is the full Moon closest to the Equinox. In that case the full Moon of October 6, wins the title this year!

So, with the Harvest Moon full on the 6th, it will be last quarter on the 13th, new on the 22nd, and first quarter on the 29th. The Moon will also provide us with an occultation of the famous Pleiades star cluster. This event should be visible to most of North America.

The fun begins at approximately 4 hours Universal Time (UT) which translates into Midnight, Eastern Daylight time (EDT), 11 PM CDT, 10 PM MDT and 9 PM PDT. This event will last for approximately 3 hours and the individual stars that will be occulted will depend on where you are located in North America.

A very bright waning gibbous Moon will make visual sightings of disappearing and reappearing stars somewhat difficult. Stars will be easier to see as they emerge from behind the Moon's dark limb as the Moon moves from west to east through the cluster. A good pair of binoculars mounted on a sturdy tripod should be steady enough if you wish to do exact timings for stars as they disappear and reappear.

Jupiter continues to move closer and closer to the western horizon as the month progresses. By the end of the month it will be so low that you'll probably need binoculars to see it at all!

On October 16th Mercury reaches its greatest elongation from the Sun. On October 17th go out about 30 minutes after sunset and, if you have a good view of the southwestern horizon, you should see Mercury and Jupiter only about 4 degrees apart with Mercury being the higher of the two.

As Jupiter fades from the western sky, Saturn will step up to fill the void of planets visible in the night sky. At the beginning of the month Saturn rises at about 3 AM Daylight Time and by the end of the month it comes up just after midnight Standard Time.

That should also serve to remind us that Daylight Time ends on Sunday the 29th. Don't forget to "fall back" and set your clocks back one hour. Enjoy your extra hour of sleep!

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