Night Sky Guide

What will you see in the night sky this autumn and winter?

Winchester Science Centre
By Wonderseekers

Night sky highlights February

Mercury greatest elongation

On 19 February, Mercury will be at one of only six dates in 2026 when it's easiest to see. Normally too close to the Sun, Mercury is best viewed at its greatest elongation, when it appears furthest from the Sun in the sky. Look low in the eastern sky just after sunset for this rare opportunity. It will be bright enough for the naked eye, but binoculars or a telescope will give an even clearer view.

Planet Parade

During late February, almost every planet will be up in the sky at the same time. Looking just after the Sun has set, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune will all be up together. Of these, Uranus and Neptune need a telescope really to spot, and Mercury can be tricky as it's so close to the Sun. The remaining three planets will be very bright and easy to see, even in very light-polluted areas.

Constellation spotting

Canis Major and Canis Minor

Look to the south between sunset and midnight and you'll find the brightest star in the sky. This is Sirius. It forms part of Canis Major, the 'big dog'. Above Sirius is another bright star, Procyon. This forms part of Canis Minor, the 'small dog'.

Gemini and Auriga

Look above Procyon. There are two apparently similar stars. These are Castor and Pollux which form Gemini, also known as 'The Twins'. Above Gemini is the third brightest star, Capella. It is part of the constellation Auriga.

Night sky highlights March

March Equinox

The 20th of March 2026 is the spring (vernal) equinox in the northern hemisphere and the autumnal equinox in the southern hemisphere. Equinoxes happen twice a year, with each hemisphere experiencing opposite seasons. On this day, all regions see roughly equal daylight and night as the Earth is positioned between tilting each hemisphere toward or away from the Sun, marking the start of astronomical spring in the north.

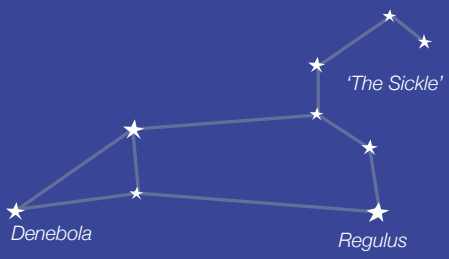
Jupiter

Jupiter is known as the king of the Solar System, the largest of our planets, able to engulf over 1000 Earths. The planet will be visible every night in March and can be located in Gemini. Through binoculars or a telescope you can see its distinctive colourful bands, and sometimes even the famous Great Red Spot, a storm that has been raging on the planet for hundreds of years.

Constellation spotting

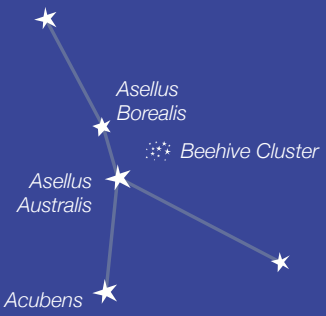
Leo

Rising in the east as the Sun sets, then slowly travelling westward throughout the night is the shape of a backwards question mark. This is the head and mane of 'The Lion', the constellation Leo.



Cancer

Cancer is a faint constellation. However, once you find it, you'll be able to spot one of the easiest deep-sky objects, M44, the Beehive Cluster.



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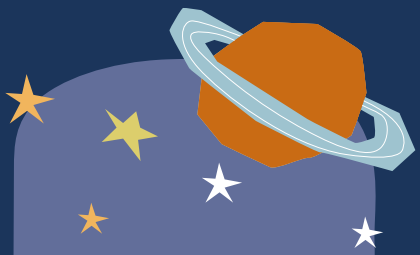
Top tips for stargazing and Moon watching

- Find the darkest spot you can. Get away from street-lights or moonlight.
- It will take your eyes up to 20 minutes to get used to the dark so be patient. The longer you wait, the more you'll see.
- Try stargazing laying down.
- You can see lots in the night sky with just your eyes. Telescopes and binoculars are great for getting a better look at the Moon and star clusters.
- If you are using a telescope or binoculars let them have 15 minutes to cool down to the outside temperature.
- Look slightly to one side to see faint objects. This is called Averted Vision.
- Monitor the Moon on different nights. Compare its position against the background stars to see how far its moved.
- See the Moon at different phases. It looks quite different depending on how the Sun is lighting it.



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wonderseekers.charity/science-at-home/stargazing-guides

With thanks to Explorer Dome

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