

Night Sky Viewing at Widener University

March 2024

Sunrise & Sunset Times

	Sunrise	Sunset
Begin Month (EST)	6:34 am	5:54 pm
End Month (EDT)	6:46 am	7:25 pm

Lunar Phases



Naked-Eye Planets in the Evening & Morning Sky this Month

Mercury (*in Aquarius-Pisces*): Mercury reached superior conjunction with the Sun on February 28th, but this March it vaults above the western horizon at dusk, and gives its best evening showing of the year. Mercury reaches maximum brightness around the 15th, and then maximum elongation on the 24th, when it sets around 8:50 pm EDT, or about 1½ hours after the Sun sets. Mercury is best viewed in the latter half of the month, about 20-30 minutes after sunset. Binoculars will help spot it.

Jupiter (*in Aries*): Jupiter resembles a brilliant golden star ensconced among the much fainter stars of the constellation Aries. The Giant Planet stands high in the southwest at dusk during March; it sets around 10:45 pm EST on the 1st, and by 10:15 pm EDT on the 31st (after Daylight Saving Time begins). Jupiter's presence in the evening sky will soon be coming to an end; it will sink into the evening twilight toward the end of April and reach conjunction with the Sun in early May.

Venus (*in Capricornus-Aquarius*): Venus has been a dazzling beacon in the early morning sky since last autumn, but it will soon vanish into the morning twilight. As March opens, Venus is already very low in the southeastern sky, rising about one hour before sunrise. By month's end, Venus is rising only about ½ hour before the Sun, and by the end of April, Venus will vanish into the dawn glare. Venus will slowly begin to reappear low in the southwest at dusk in July.

Mars (*in Capricornus-Aquarius*): Mars rises in the southeast about one hour before sunrise all month, which is by 5:20 am EST on the 1st and by 5:30 am EDT at month's end. Mars resembles a modest orange star hovering above the horizon, and it will not become bright and prominent until later this summer. Mars will be at its best (15 times brighter than it is now) when it reaches opposition with the Sun in January 2025.

Saturn (*in Aquarius*): Saturn was in conjunction with the Sun on February 28th, and is too close to the Sun to be visible as March begins, but it will reappear at dawn low in the east toward month's end. Saturn passes close to brilliant Venus on the morning of March 21st, but the pair will hover just above the horizon, making it challenging to view if trees and houses are in the way. Binoculars will help pick out Saturn next to much brighter Venus.

Earth: The noon Sun stands directly over the equator at 11:06 pm EDT on March 19th. This point is the *Vernal Equinox*, or simply the *March Equinox*, which marks the start of spring in the northern hemisphere and of autumn in the southern hemisphere.

Constellations and Bright Stars Visible by 9 pm Local Time in March

Cassiopeia – high in NNW, looking like an “M”
Bright stars *Shedar, Caph, Ruchbah*

Perseus – W of overhead, E of Cassiopeia
Bright stars *Mirfak and Algol*

Auriga – high in NE
Bright star *Capella*, just W of overhead by 9 pm

Aries – low in WNW
Bright stars *Hamal, Sheratan*
Planet *Jupiter*

Taurus – halfway up in WSW, to right of Orion
Bright star *Aldebaran*
Star Clusters *Pleiades & Hyades*

Orion – up in SW
Bright stars *Betelgeuse, Rigel*

Gemini – high up in S, to upper left of Orion
Bright stars *Pollux, Castor*

Canis Major – up in SSW, to lower left of Orion
Bright star *Sirius*

Canis Minor – high in S, below Gemini
Bright star *Procyon*

Leo – high in SE
Bright star *Regulus*

Ursa Major – up in NNE, getting higher
Asterism *Big Dipper*, w/ pointer stars *Merak, Dubhe*;
handle stars *Alioth, Mizar (& Alcor), Alkaid*

Hydra – moderately high up in SE
Bright star *Alphard* (“the Solitary One”), lower R of
Regulus

Boötes – rising in NE, near handle of Big Dipper
Bright star *Arcturus*

For more information on the night sky, visit the Widener Observatory Stargazing website at www.widener.edu/stargazing/. A set of free sky maps can be obtained at www.skymaps.com/.