LAFAYETTE SCIENCE MUSEUM

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Sky Events Calendar • April, May, and June 2018

All times listed are in Central Standard Time or Central Daylight Time, according to the time in effect on that date.

For more information, call the Museum at 337-291-5544 and ask to speak with someone in the planetarium. Some of these objects and events can be seen during Planetarium star parties — check the Museum web site to see a list of star parties and other events hosted by the Planetarium. Reminders of some of these events will appear on the Lafayette Science Museum Facebook page as the dates approach.

The Internet and media wildly over-hype non-events like "super moons" and "blue moons" and even some actual events like meteor showers. We'll give you more realistic information!

April 3: The bright object ***near the moon*** before dawn will be ***Jupiter***.

April 7: The two starlike objects ***near the moon*** before dawn will be ***Mars*** and ***Saturn***, with Mars being slightly farther from the moon than Saturn. All three will be seen in the same view in binoculars!

April 13: Find the ***thin crescent moon*** in the east during morning twilight. Hold your hand at arm's length and look to the left and slightly below the moon by about the width of your palm. Can you see ***Mercury***, appearing as a moderately bright star point?

April 13 – May 13: This will be a good time to look low in the east for ***Mercury*** during morning twilight. The appearances of the ***crescent moon near Mercury*** will conveniently start and end this period!

April 17: Look to the west after sunset tonight to see brilliant ***Venus*** near the crescent moon.

April 18: The waxing crescent ***moon will appear near the Hyades star cluster*** this evening and binoculars should show the Moon and the brighter members of the cluster in the same view. For backyard telescope observers the Moon will "occult," or block from view, several cluster stars. The stars will disappear behind the unlighted limb of the moon, one of the most instantaneous events the human eye can see. Two ***occultations*** will happen between 7:55 and 8:00 p.m. with reappearances on the other side of the moon at 8:41 and 8:55 p.m. Another star will be occulted about 8:29, reappearing about 9:25. Other disappearances will happen about 9:18 and 9:25, with reappearances of stars already behind the moon at 8:07 and 8:41 p.m. Depending on your telescope, you may see others, too. Events before 8:15 may be challenging because of twilight and those after 9:15 may be challenging because they will be very low above the horizon.

April 22: Look at the ***moon*** in binoculars tonight. Can you also see a clustering of faint stars near it? That's the ***Beehive Star Cluster***, about 2800 light years distant.

April 22 – 25: Look at ***Venus*** in binoculars during this period to see it in the same view with the ***Pleiades star cluster***. Wide angle binoculars will show this for a couple nights before and after this period. The Pleiades are at a distance of about 440 light years, but during this period Venus is only at about 11.5 light *minutes*.

April 24: The bright star near the ***moon*** tonight will be ***Regulus*** in Leo, the Lion.

April 29: Watch in the east-southeast for the ***moon and bright Jupiter*** to rise together by about 9:00 p.m. They will appear close together all night after that. Look the next night after about 10 p.m. to see how far the moon appears to move in 24 hours!

May 3 – June 7: Watch for ***Mercury*** low in the east during morning twilight. It will look like a moderately bright, slightly reddish starpoint.

May 4: The bright object ***near the moon*** from midnight to dawn this morning will be ***Saturn***.

May 6: The bright starlike object ***near the moon*** before dawn will be ***Mars***.

May 9: ***Jupiter*** is at opposition, meaning that it is opposite the sun in Earth's sky and rising at sunset. It will be the bright starlike object in the eastern sky for the next few months.

May 10: Look at ***Jupiter*** in binoculars to see a nice double star near it. That double star is about 77 light years distant and has the improbable traditional name of ***Zubenelgenubi*** (it can also be called Alpha Librae). Over 100 solar systems would fit between those two stars! Jupiter and Zubenelgenubi will be in the same binocular view every night through the end of summer—a monthly look will show Jupiter moving against the background of stars.

May 13: The bright starlike object ***near the moon*** during morning twilight will be ***Mercury***.

May 17: Look for the crescent moon near brilliant Venus tonight. Very wide field binoculars will show the ***moon, Venus, and the M35 star cluster*** all in the same view. The moon's distance will be about 226,000 miles, with Venus at about 126 million miles, and M35 at 2800 light years. The moon will move off, but Venus and M35 will be in the same binocular view until at least May 24.

May 21: The bright star ***near the moon*** tonight will be ***Regulus*** in Leo, the Lion.

May 26 & 27: The very bright object ***near the moon*** on these two nights will be ***Jupiter***. They will be in the same wide angle binocular view on the 27th.

June 1: The moderately bright starlike object ***near the moon*** between midnight and dawn will be ***Saturn***.

June 3: The bright object ***near the moon*** before dawn will be ***Mars***.

June 14: Look for the very thin ***crescent moon*** low in the northwest as the stars come out tonight. The brightest of the starlike objects to its right will be ***Mercury***.

June 14 – July 24: This will be a great time to see ***Mercury*** low in the west during evening twilight.

June 16: By tonight ***Venus and the Beehive Star Cluster*** should be in the same binocular view, and a slight shift of the binoculars should bring the ***Beehive and the moon*** into the same view! All three objects probably will not all fit at the same time, though. Venus and the Beehive will stay in the same binocular view from now until at least June 23.

June 17: The bright star ***near the moon*** tonight will be ***Regulus*** in Leo, the Lion.

June 19: Tonight ***Venus*** will appear to skirt the distant ***Beehive Star Cluster*** closely enough that the planet and some of the cluster stars will be in the same low power telescope view. The cluster is about 577 light years distant, meaning that the light we see has been traveling 577 years to get here.

June 21: The ***June solstice*** occurs at 5:07 a.m., officially beginning Northern Hemisphere Summer.

June 23: The bright object ***near the moon*** tonight will be ***Jupiter***.

June 27: The bright starlike object ***near the moon*** tonight will be ***Saturn***. Saturn will be at opposition on this date, meaning that it is opposite the sun as seen in Earth's sky, rising at sunset and staying in the sky all night. Telescopes will show its famous rings.

June 30 & July 1: ***Mars appears near the moon*** between midnight and dawn on both these mornings.