

Night Sky Viewing at Widener University

February 2012

Sunset & Sunrise Times

	Sunset	Sunrise
Begin Month (EST)	5:20 pm	7:10 am
End Month (EST)	5:53 pm	6:35 am

Lunar Phases

Full Moon	7 th	“Snow Moon”
Last Quarter	14 th	
New Moon	21 st	
First Quarter	29 th	

Bright Stars & Constellations Visible Around 8 pm EST

Constellation **Cassiopeia** is high in the northwest, looking like the letter “M”
Constellation **Perseus** follows **Cassiopeia** high in the northwest
Stars **Betelgeuse** & **Rigel** in **Orion** are high in the south
Star **Aldebaran** in **Taurus** and star cluster **Pleiades** (7 Sisters) above and to the right of **Orion**
Star **Capella** in **Auriga** is nearly overhead
Stars **Pollux** and **Castor** are high in the east, in constellation **Gemini** following **Taurus**
Star **Sirius** (brightest star in the sky) in **Canis Major** (Big Dog) is high in the southeast
Star **Procyon** in **Canis Minor** (Little Dog) is high in the east
Star **Regulus** in **Leo** (Lion) is low in the east-northeast
Constellation **Ursa Major**, which contains the **Big Dipper**, is low in the north-northeast

Naked Eye Planets This Month in the Evening & Morning Sky

Mercury. In **Capricornus-Aquarius-Pisces**. Mercury reaches superior conjunction with the Sun on the 7th, and is therefore too close to the Sun to be glimpsed for the first half of February. Toward the end of the month, however, Mercury swings up into the evening sky, setting about an hour and a half after the Sun by month’s end. At that time, look for what appears to be a yellow star low above the western horizon about 30 minutes to an hour after sunset.

Venus In **Aquarius-Pisces**. Venus is like a dazzling yellow gem hovering above the southwestern horizon at dusk. Throughout February, Venus sets about three and a half hours after the Sun, allowing plenty of time to observe it well into the early evening. See how soon you can spot Venus with the unaided eye moderately high in the southwest after sunset.

Jupiter. In **Aries**. Jupiter continues to shine brightly high in the south-southwest during the evening hours, resembling a brilliant golden star. Jupiter is second only to Venus among the planets in brightness, and it remains in good position for viewing until late evening. As February opens, Jupiter is setting in the west around midnight, over three hours after Venus dips below the horizon. By month’s end, Jupiter is setting at about 10:30 pm EST, less than an hour after Venus. Jupiter is sinking closer toward the horizon with each passing night, while Venus is ascending. The two planets will ultimately cross paths in a spectacular planetary conjunction next month.

Mars In **Leo**. A year ago in February, Mars was in conjunction with the Sun and completely unobservable. This February is another story, with Mars approaching opposition with the Sun in early March. As February opens, Mars resembles a very bright orange-red star in the constellation Leo. Mars rises at about 8:30 pm at the beginning of February, and a little before 6 pm at the end of the month. By the end of February, Mars will be nearly the same brightness as Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky. Enjoy the color contrast between the two disparate bodies: Mars glows distinctly orange-red while Sirius shines with a bluish white color.

Saturn In **Virgo**. Rising in the east around 11:30 pm at the start of February, Saturn resembles a bright cream colored star located below Spica, Virgo’s brightest star. By month’s end, Saturn is rising a little after 9:30 pm, around the same time that Venus is setting. Even a modest telescope will reveal Saturn’s magnificent ring system.

*For more information on astronomy and weather, visit the Widener University Public Viewing Website at <http://www.widener.edu/stargazing/>. A set of free sky maps can be obtained at <http://www.skymaps.com/>