

Watch for Venus, Jupiter in evening sky

APRIL brings us the return of daylight saving time, a meteor shower, and an excellent opportunity to see Venus in the daytime sky.

This month's morning planets are Mars and Saturn. Evening planets are Venus and Jupiter, although Jupiter will be gone by month's end. The length of the day increases by one hour and 19 minutes. On April 1, sunrise is at 6:4 a.m. and sunset is at 6:58 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time), allowing for a possible 12 hours and 44 minutes of sunshine. On April 30 these times are 6:28 a.m. and 8:31 p.m. (Eastern Daylight Time), for a possible 14 hours and three minutes of sunshine.

FACE WEST about 45 minutes after sunset on the 1st and find Venus. That will be easy because Venus will be the brightest object visible in the west. Below Venus, closer to the horizon, is Jupiter, looking like a bright star.

Directly above Venus is the beautiful Pleiades (PLEE-a-dee) star cluster. Pleiades resembles a tiny "dipper." It's located in the constellation of Taurus and marks the bull's shoulder. Use binoculars to observe the Pleiades and watch as Venus passes the star cluster over the weekend.

Venus is at maximum elongation (apparent distance) from the sun on the 2nd. It is 46 degrees east (left) of the sun. If you observe Venus with a low-power telescope you may be surprised to see that it looks like the first-quarter moon. Venus shows phases as it orbits the sun. Watch its phase change during the next several months.

FULL MOON occurs at 4:22 a.m. (EST) on April 2. The bright star below and to the left of the moon, on the evening of the 2nd, is Spica (SPY-

skywatch

ca). Spica is the brightest star in Virgo.

April 3 is Easter Sunday. It is also the beginning of Daylight Saving Time (DST). These two events just happen to occur on the same day in 1988, and there is no special significance to it. Of the two events, daylight time was determined by an act of Congress. Easter is determined by the phase of the moon.

DST begins at 2 a.m. on April 3. DST, when we set our clocks forward one hour, always begins on the first Sunday in April. We do not alter the speed of Earth's rotation or the length of the day, we merely alter the device by which time is measured.

A little more than 100 years ago there were no standardized time zones. Everyone kept "local" time. "Noontime" was when the sun was due south and the shadow cast by a stick was at its shortest.

Of course, local noon in Detroit was different from noon in Lansing, which was different from Grand Rapids, and so on. At one time Michigan had 27 local time zones.

RAILROADS HAD an impossible time scheduling their arrivals and departures. In 1883 the railroads divided the country into four main time zones.

These standard-time zones were not immediately accepted by all the public, but over the course of years standard time became the norm. It wasn't until 35 years later that Congress, acting in its usual hasty manner, made the standard time zones the law of the land.

Originally Michigan was in the

Central Time Zone because we are geographically closer to the Central Time longitude line in Chicago than we are to the Eastern Time line in Philadelphia. A vote of the people of Michigan placed our state in the Eastern zone so it would share the same time with businesses on the east coast.

If we stayed on Eastern Standard Time, sunrise at the end of this month would be at 5:28 a.m. and sunset at 7:31 p.m. On Eastern Daylight Time sunrise is at 6:28 a.m. and sunset is at 8:31 p.m. We gain our later

moon, rather than the new moon, was so pilgrims to the Holy Land could travel at night by the light of the moon. Since the start of spring occurs on March 20 or 21, the earliest date that can be Easter is March 22.

But now we have to consider the inevitable exceptions to the rule. If the first full moon to occur after the start of spring falls on a Sunday, then the following Sunday is Easter. If the full moon happens to be on the same day as the vernal equinox, then the April full moon is used.

THE GROUND RULES for determining Easter were set up in the year 325 A.D. when the Emperor Constantine called for a Council at Nicea for the purpose of calendar reform.

Based on the advice of his Christian Council, he decreed that Easter would be observed on the first Sunday following the first full moon that occurs after the vernal equinox (the start of spring).

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