

# Harvest moon due Friday; next, Hunter's Moon

**THE FULL MOON** that occurs at 7:51 a.m. on Sept. 15 is a very special one. It's called the Harvest Moon. But since we have full moons every month throughout the year, what makes this one so special?

Because the moon is in orbit around the earth, it appears in different parts of the sky from night to night. Generally the moon will rise about one hour later each night. But in autumn the full moon is located at the part of the moon's orbit that has the least tilt with respect to Earth's horizon. The moon seems to skim along the horizon, rising at about the same time each evening. In about the same part of the sky. In fact, for the four evenings starting with the Sept. 13, each moon rise occurs within 25 minutes of the previous night's.

The light scattered by the full moon was a help to farmers, allowing them to continue their harvesting after sunset. Hence it was called the Harvest Moon. The full moon that follows the Harvest Moon was said to be a help to hunters. You can figure out what that full moon is called.

People occasionally wonder if the phase of the moon has any effect on humans. It really shouldn't be expected to have any effect at all. We see different phases of the moon depending on what part is being illuminated by the sun. The moon is always somewhere near the earth, so any effect it should have should be a constant one, not dependant on which half is being illuminated.

**LOOK FOR THE MOON** in the east northeast, three and one-half hours after sunset, on the Sept. 19. It is located in the constellation of Taurus the bull. Above and to the right of the moon is the Pleiades (PLEI) star cluster. Looking like a tiny

**skywatch**

**Raymond E. Bullock**

and another going from below to above.

The precise moment of crossover, going from north to south, is when autumn officially begins for the northern hemisphere. A person standing on earth's equator at local noon would see the sun directly overhead on the celestial equator. The sun will rise due east and set due west. The length of the day and length of night are about equal, so this is called the equinox.

Although we may be facing the start of autumn, people below the equator face the start of spring.

**THE MOON**, Castor and Pollux form a triangle on the morning of the Sept. 23. Notice how far the

moon has moved in just one day. The moon's daily motion is very easy to notice when it passes bright stars and planets.

Mercury is officially at inferior conjunction on September 24. The planet is located between the earth and the sun and is not visible. (When Mercury is located beyond the sun, as seen from the earth, it is called superior conjunction.)

Regulus (RIG u lus), the "heart" of Leo the lion, is the bright star five degrees below the waning crescent moon on the morning of the 26th.

Mars is in conjunction with the sun on the 29th. Mars is located behind the sun, as seen from the earth, and is not visible. "Inferior" or "superior" conjunction is not specified with Mars because, unlike Mercury, Mars never gets between the earth and the sun and can never be at inferior conjunction.

*Raymond Bullock is the former coordinator of the planetarium and observatory at the Cranbrook Institute of Science. He now works for a Troy-based company that specializes in laser displays and effects.*

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