

Meteor showers to make Yule skies twinkle

Everyone knows that the start of winter (and the shortest days of the year) occurs in December. This month's events also include two meteor showers, Venus at its brightest and an opposition of Jupiter.

Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn are evening planets this month. Mars will be visible before sunrise.

The length of the day decreases by 11 minutes this month. On Dec. 1, the sun rises at 7:42 a.m. and sets at 5:01 p.m., for a possible nine hours and 19 minutes of sunlight. On the 31st these times are 8:01 a.m. and 5:09 p.m. for a possible nine hours and eight minutes of sun. (All times are Eastern Standard Time.)

Face southwest, 45 minutes after sunset, on Dec. 1 to see a nice grouping with the moon, Venus and Saturn. Venus is the brilliant "star" to

the south (left) of the moon. Saturn is about the same distance to the west (right) of the moon.

On the following night, the moon has moved to the south of Venus. (Keep watching Saturn during December. Later this month it will help you find Mercury.)

Use a small telescope to observe Venus before total darkness. You may be surprised to see that planet looking like a one-third crescent moon. Venus, like the moon, reflects the light of the sun and has phases. Watch Venus during the month and you'll see its phase growing smaller. The moon is at first-quarter phase at 8:26 p.m. Dec. 5. It is one-quarter of its way around the earth.

JUPITER'S FOUR largest moons will put on a nice display on the eve-



skywatch

Raymond E. Bullock

ning of the 8th. They will be lined up with Io (EVE ob) and Europa (your OH pa) to the east of Jupiter, Ganymede (GAN ee mead) and Callisto (cal LIS toe) will be on the west.

On the next night, all four moons will be aligned to the west of Jupiter. These largest moons are visible

through binoculars, so don't let the lack of a telescope stop you from observing.

Look for Jupiter in the east-northeast, two hours after sunset. It looks like a very bright star in the constellation of Gemini (GEM in eye).

The moon is in the constellation of Taurus on the evening of the 10th.

Below and to the left of the moon is the beautiful Pleiades (PLEE e dees) star cluster. The Pleiades looks like a tiny dipper, but the light scattered by the moon will make the cluster difficult to see.

About 14 degrees below the Pleiades is the star Aldebaran (al DEB a ran), the orange-red "eye" of Taurus. On the night of the 11th, the moon forms a triangle with the Pleiades and Aldebaran.

Full moon occurs at 11:30 a.m. Dec. 12. The moon will be fully lighted by the sun tonight and rise in the

east northeast as the sun sets in the west southwest.

When the moon is full, it is always opposite the sun. Since the sun is at its lowest in the sky for the year in December, this full moon will be at its highest for the year.

WATCH THE MOON move through Gemini from the 12th through the 14th. The full moon is about 12 degrees above Jupiter on the 12th, and five degrees to the left of Jupiter on the 13th.

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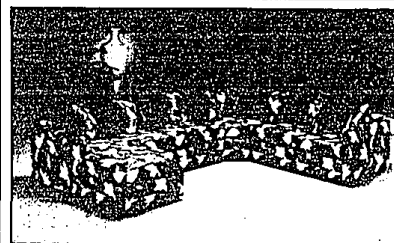
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