

# Moon, rules determine when to wear your Easter bonnet



RAYMOND E. BULLOCK

**SKY WATCH**  
Easter Sunday is on April 11 this year. Determining the date of this very erratic holiday depends on the phase of the moon and a few rules.  
The ground rules for determining Easter were set up in the year 325 A.D. when the Emperor Constantine called for a Council at Nice 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 occurred after the

vernal equinox (the start of spring).  
The reason for choosing the full moon, rather than the new moon, was so persons making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land could travel at night by moonlight. 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. If the April full moon falls on a Sunday, the following Sunday is Easter UNLESS that date is later than April 26, which is the latest date Easter

is permitted to fall. If that Sunday does fall after the 25th, then the previous Sunday, the one with the full moon, must be used.  
So all things considered, Easter can come as early as March 22, which it last did in the year 1818 and will again in 2285, or it may come as late as April 25, which it did in 1943 and will again in 2038. This year Easter Sunday is April 11, which is five days after the full moon. Now, wasn't that simple?  
The moon will be found within the border of Sagittarius the archer on the morning of the 12th. It will be sitting just above the "lid" of the "teacup" that marks that constellation.  
On the following morning the moon will be located four degrees above and to the right of the faint outer planets Uranus and Nep-

tune, but these planets are not visible without the aid of binoculars or a telescope. Later this month Uranus will overtake Neptune (as seen from the vantage point of the sun).  
The moon will be at last quarter phase at 3:39 p.m. on April 13. It will be starting the last quarter of its orbit around the earth. When the moon is at last quarter phase it will rise after midnight and will be in the south by sunrise.  
Look for Saturn on the morning of the 16th. It will be easy to identify that planet; it will look like a star four degrees below the lower cusp (point) of the waning (fading) crescent moon. Follow the moon across the sky during the next three mornings as it ap-

proaches brilliant Venus in the east.  
On the 19th a beautiful display will be visible with the crescent moon less than one degree to the right of Venus in the east. There will be a rare occultation (covering) of Venus by the moon, but unfortunately that will occur after sunrise in Michigan. A much more spectacular display will occur for people in Hawaii. (Details of the occultation will be found in the April issue of "Sky and Telescope" magazine. Check your local bookstore for availability.)  
Uranus will overtake Neptune on April 21, as seen from the perspective of the sun. (From the earth's perspective, there will be a

conjunction, or 'grouping,' between the two in September.) This is significant in that it will be the first passage since Neptune was discovered; the last one occurred in 1821, which was 25 years before Neptune's discovery! Will this alignment cause the destruction of the world by earthquakes and tidal waves? Well, it certainly didn't happen in 1821, and it's unlikely to happen in 1993, so don't lose any sleep over it. Since this alignment happens only once in 172 years, the next passage will not occur until 2165.  
The New Moon, which happens with considerably more regularity, will occur at 7:50 p.m. on April 21.

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