

CAROLINA SKIES APRIL - MAY 2018

Hold the star chart over your head. Find north, and align your chart accordingly. You may need a flashlight, but be sure not to ruin your night vision with a bright bulb. Use a red light, or put a brown paper bag over your flashlight for a muted glow.

Begin your sky tour with the Big Dipper. The Dipper's "pointer stars" can guide you to Polaris, the North Star. The Dipper's handle also "arcs" toward the orange star Arcturus, where you can "speed on to Spica." Can you curve on to Corvus? South of the Dipper (and its constellation Ursa Major, the Big Bear) you can find the backward question mark forming Leo the Lion's head and mane.

Brilliant planet **Venus** shines beacon-like in the western evening sky just after sunset, climbing higher from night to night throughout the spring. Giant **Jupiter** starts out in the east in early evening, then treks westward as the night progresses. It is followed by **Saturn**, which rises in the east after midnight or late evening. At the beginning of April, the ringed planet is accompanied closely by reddish **Mars**, just to its south. On April 7/8, the Moon, around last quarter phase, is near both planets. Throughout the month and then into May, Mars separates eastward from Saturn. **Mercury**, low in pre-dawn twilight is difficult to see now.

Our **Star Families** series for families with children ages 7-12 continues with "Spring Skies" (May 5) and "Survival Skills Using the Sky" (June 2). The 6th annual **N.C. Statewide Star Party** happens April 20 and 21, 2018; find a Star Party event near you at <http://ncsciencefestival.org/starparty>

Skywatching Sessions:

Dorothea Dix Park, Raleigh

Saturday, April 7, 8-11 pm (registration required)

Chapel Hill Public Library Pritchard Park

Friday, April 20, 7-10 pm (a Statewide Star Party Event)

NC Museum of Art, Night Bright Community Festival: Space Is the Place

Thursday, May 24, 8:30-11 pm (NCMA/Etix tickets required)

Admission to skywatching is free, telescopes are active, and constellation tours are provided. Sessions will be canceled if weather is poor. For directions to the skywatching sites, cancellation updates, and information on astronomy and skywatching classes for children and adults, visit moreheadplanetarium.org, or call (919) 962-1236.

