

CAROLINA SKIES APRIL - MAY 2020

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.

Venus dominates the evening sky, shining brilliantly in the west shortly after sunset. In April, it remains visible until around 11 p.m., but sets earlier throughout the month of May. Venus is joined mid-May by swift little **Mercury**. The two planets appear to pass close by each other on May 21st and 22nd and are joined by a thin crescent Moon on the 23rd. Mercury then ascends higher above the horizon while Venus plunges low into the glow of evening twilight. Meanwhile, **Jupiter**, **Saturn**, and **Mars** cluster in our southeastern pre-dawn sky. Saturn and Mars are close together on April 1, but then draw farther apart as the days progress toward summer.

April is **STEM Education Month** in North Carolina! For virtual opportunities to engage with astronomy and other STEM (*science, technology, engineering, mathematics*) topics, check the **North Carolina Science Festival** website: <https://www.ncsciencefestival.org/>

Skywatching Sessions:

After it's safe to gather in person again, we'll be back with our free public monthly skywatching sessions.

<http://moreheadplanetarium.org/skywatching>

