



STARRY TRAILS

MAY 2026

Our two brightest planets are putting on a great show once again, in the evening sky, this month. Soon after sunset, dazzling Venus, brightening to magnitude -4.0, can be located in the western sky. On May 1, Venus is visible until 10:30 pm and until 11:00 pm on May 31. On May 18, the crescent Moon pairs with Venus for a lovely sight. On May 19, the crescent Moon will be above Venus. Jupiter will be up and slightly left of the crescent Moon, another lovely sight. Venus and Jupiter continue to get closer throughout the month (Illustration 1). By May 31, the two brightest planets will be eight degrees apart (Illustration 2).

Brilliant Jupiter, at magnitude -2.0, is present in the night sky until 1:00 am in early May and midnight at month's end. You can locate Jupiter high in the western sky after sunset. Telescope views are great. Grab a pair of binoculars and as you focus on Jupiter you will see pinpoints of light, by the king of the planets, which are the Galilean moons. The crescent Moon pairs with Jupiter on May 19 and 20.

For our hike, we will begin around 9:30pm. Let's grab our jacket, Starry Trail Map and binoculars. We can still enjoy a few more hikes without mosquitoes! We will start by facing west. The two stars that look almost the same are Gemini, the Twins. The bright red-orange star to the right of Gemini is Capella. To the left of Gemini is the star Procyon (Illustration 3). This is called the Arch of Spring.

Trek to the right and you will find the Big Dipper, high overhead, pouring water out of the cup, like the spring rains! Take the two stars at the end of the cup of the Big Dipper and draw an imaginary line to the next bright star. You have reached the North Star! The North Star, or Polaris, is at the end of the handle of the Little Dipper (Illustration 4). Queen Cassiopeia, the W shape, is low in the north or below the Little Dipper. Head back to the Big Dipper. Hop off of the flat part of the cup and look for the shape of a backwards question mark. This is the head of Leo, the Lion (Illustration 5). How about a challenge? Take your binoculars and scan to the left of Leo, almost to Gemini, the Twins. Do you see the beautiful Beehive Star Cluster (M44)?

Turn to the right or east. Look high, almost overhead, and arc off the handle of the Big Dipper to the bright yellow-orange star, Arcturus. Just below Arcturus and to the left, you will come upon a semi-circle of stars. It looks almost like a necklace, but it is the Northern Crown or Corona Borealis. I think it looks like a smiley face! Hike down and to the left from Corona Borealis. There you will see a keystone shape. This is the body of Hercules, the bravest and strongest hero! Binocular time! Take your binoculars and scan around the part of Hercules that faces Corona. Do you see the fuzzy object? This is the finest globular Star Cluster (M13) in the northern skies! If you head down and to the left, you will spot the bright star, Vega (Illustration 6). Journey back to Arcturus. Look right and you will see a bright blue, white star. This is Spica, part of the constellation Virgo. Virgo hosts the sky's richest zone of galaxies! It is simply great telescope viewing in this part of the sky.

Another great night of Stargazing! Take one last breath of fresh spring air and head inside.

Next month, the close pairing of Venus & Jupiter and signs of summer!!

Highlights:

May 1 – Full Moon. According to folklore it is the Full Flower Moon.

May 6 – Eta Aquarid Meteor Shower peaks.

May 9 – Last Quarter Moon.

May 16 – New Moon.

May 18 – The crescent Moon passes north of Venus after sunset.

May 20 – The crescent Moon passes north of Jupiter after sunset.

May 23 – First Quarter Moon.

May 31 – Blue Moon! The second Full Moon for the month.

Brightest Stars: **West** – Procyon, Castor, Pollux, Capella. **Overhead** – Regulus. **East** – Arcturus, Spica, Vega.

Binocular Highlights: The Moon, Jupiter, Beehive Cluster M44, Deep sky objects around Capella (M36, 37, 38), Hercules Globular Star Cluster M13, Coma Berenice Cluster (in between Leo & Arcturus).

Telescope Highlights: The Moon, Venus, Jupiter, M10, M12, M51, M35, M44, M13, M57, M3, M81, M82, M92, M104, M35, 36, 37, 38 (near Capella).

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Night Sky Illustrations created by Suzie Dills using Starry Night Backyard & Stellarium.

Illustrations courtesy of Cassandra Dills.