

Well, now that the full Moon is out of the way, perhaps we can look at something. Oh, by the way, Halloween is on Sunday. Sorry to disappoint you, but there is no full Moon on Halloween.

In fact, a full Moon on Halloween is a rare event no matter what all the greeting cards, pictures, and posters of the witch riding her broom across the full Moon show. The next time the Moon will be full on Halloween will be the year 2010.

Halloween is an astronomical event, it is a cross-quarter day laying roughly halfway between the spring and summer solstices. Technically it's the old Celtic holiday of Samhain (pronounced Sow-an).

The other quarter or cross-quarter days are in February (Groundhog Day or Candlemas), May, (Beltain or May Day), and August (Midsummer or Lamas Day). These days were important to the ancient farmers as they indicated when to plant or harvest crops.

Since we can't watch a witch fly across the full Moon this Halloween, we can look at another spectral group often associated with Halloween, the Pleiades star cluster.

What, that tiny little group of seven stars? Associated with Halloween and spooks? Yep, Ancient civilizations from the Romans, to the Babylonians, to the Druids in England, to the Aztec and Mayan people in South America all had some association with the Pleiades and sinister doings.

It could be wars, earthquakes, destruction, upheaval or other tumultuous events and all were associated with the tiny Seven Sisters. The Mayan people believed the Earth had been destroyed several times when the Pleiades were overhead on Halloween. Then it was created new all over again only to await the next Halloween.

In those days the small group of stars could be seen almost overhead directly south at midnight, and they were there every year watching over the devious doings of us humans.

This Halloween the Pleiades will be above the eastern horizon by 9 p.m. MDT rising with their associated constellations, Taurus, the Bull and Auriga, the Charioteer. Look east just above the horizon.

The Pleiades can be seen without any optical help, but a pair of binoculars, or even a small telescope will work fine.

We normally associate the seven stars with the group which accounts for their other name, the "Seven Sisters." But in reality there are more than 400 stars in the group.

The sky will be nice and dark this Halloween because the Moon doesn't rise until 3 a.m. MDT, so it will be a good night for getting goodies in your bag, and bagging a few astronomical treats.

The launch of space shuttle Discovery, SST-133, is as of now, scheduled for the evening of Nov. 1. This may be one of the last times we can watch a shuttle and the International Space Station fly over together. More later.

SKY WATCH: The only planet in the evening sky now is Jupiter. It is the bright object in the southeast after sunset. While not visible with the eye alone, another outer gas-giant planet, Uranus, can be observed just to the left of Jupiter using binoculars or a small telescope.

Don't confuse the star 22 Piscium located about halfway between Jupiter and Uranus. The outer planet has a slightly blueish tint to it.

Saturn will be a small dot in the east about 45-minutes before sunrise. Right now Venus is between Earth and the Sun heading for a return to the morning skies in late November.

NEXT WEEK: More astronomical blathering.

