

More dark means more viewing

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Now that the way we count the time of day has returned to normal, we are suddenly noticing that it is dark a lot sooner.

By the middle of next week the Sun will be dropping below the western horizon at about 4:30 p.m. MST.

Now, while that may not be good for the average person, it is great for us astronomers. That means about another hour of dark that we can use for outside observation.

Not only that, but we can do our observations earlier in the evening and be back inside sooner.

Normally, with the change of season we see a change of constellations in the sky. However, our old friends, the stars of the Summer Triangle must not have received the memo.

They will be hanging around until the end of December and early January.

Tonight, Wednesday, Nov. 7, go outside about two hours after local sunset and look toward the west. Almost overhead will be Vega, Deneb, and Altair, the stars that make up the Summer Triangle asterism.

Another of our old friends, the planet Jupiter, will be above the eastern horizon and in good position for viewing at about 8:30 p.m. local time.

Jupiter is right in the middle of the constellation Taurus, the Bull, right in the "V" shaped Hyades star cluster that make up the critter's face. The Hyades is a good place to go with binoculars.

Since we are out looking at Taurus, keep an eye out for little streaks of light called meteors.

The north Taurid meteor shower can be viewed all week, but will be best seen about or after midnight on Sunday, Nov. 11 into Monday morning, Nov. 12.

Usually the best time for observing meteor showers is after midnight and Taurus will be almost overhead in the eastern sky when the peak occurs, a prime location for observing.

Find a good dark-sky place, bring a blanket or sleeping bag, a reclining lawn chair, some friends, and dress warmly. A big jug of hot chocolate or coffee and some munchies wouldn't hurt.

The shower-leftover bits and pieces of comet 15P Tempel/Tuttle-will only feature 15 to 20 streaks an hour. But it more than makes up for the scarcity with the occasional fireball, or very bright streak which sometimes leave a smoky trail.

Normally binoculars are not needed for a meteor watch, but would come in handy to observe these smoky meteor trails.

There is another meteor shower later in the month, more about it next week.

SKY WATCH: New moon, Tuesday, Nov. 13. Mars is still visible very low on the western horizon. Look for it about an hour after local sunset in the southwest. Mars is a very small, bright dot so binoculars will be helpful. The gas-giant planet, Jupiter, rises in the east at about 7:30 p.m. local time and will be in best viewing position a couple of hours later.

If you are a morning person, the bright object in the eastern sky is the planet Venus. On the morning of Sunday, Nov. 11, a very slender crescent moon will be just below and right of the bright planet. Now is a good time to begin watching Venus for the next few weeks.

Starting next week watch for the planet Saturn to return to the sky. Day by day Venus and Saturn will creep closer together until they have a very close conjunction on the mornings of Nov. 26 and 27.

NEXT WEEK: The Leonid meteor shower and more astronomical blathering.