

We are halfway through autumn and rapidly cruising toward winter. Well, technically the halfway point is today but that is just so much detail.

Aside from the typically nasty weather often associated with autumn, there is a good side. The nights are getting longer and the Sun is setting earlier giving us more time for stargazing.

Especially this week, the moon is just past new and will be presenting a delightful slender crescent in the early evening with Earthshine. As we have discussed before, Earthshine is sunlight reflected off of Earth back onto the unlit side of the moon.

With Earthshine, the moon has a ghostly appearance looking like a semi-darkened full moon with a bright crescent where sunlight is direct. The effect is enhanced using binoculars viewing in a dark sky.

Also tonight, Wednesday, Nov. 6, will be a good time to use those binoculars to look just below the moon for a couple of nice nebular objects. M20, the Trifid Nebula, and M8, the Lagoon Nebula.

The best time to look will be 45 minutes to an hour after local sunset looking southwest. A clear, unobstructed horizon is best. No trees or houses blocking the view. Also, if you have a convenient hilltop, that would be nice.

Put the moon just outside of the binocular field of view at about the 2:00 position. Directly in the center will be the M20, the Trifid Nebula, and M8, the Lagoon Nebula. If you have even a small telescope much finer detail of both nebulae will be presented, (M20 is on lower left).

Follow the line down from the moon through the nebula for the very bright planet Venus. The second planet out from the Sun planet has been called the twin of Earth because they are about the same size and mass, but with Venus there is that deadly poisonous atmosphere thing, so any similarity stops there.

Moving further, place Venus outside the field of view at the 12:00 position, then move straight down another field of view length for a couple of nice star clusters. M6, the Butterfly, and M7 Ptolemy's Cluster. They both will be side-by-side in the same field of view (M7 is on the left).

Both clusters will be very close to the horizon at that time, so there may be some "soup" reducing the view somewhat.

The moon will move away, up and to the left the next night, but the nebulae will be around for another week, the star clusters will be lost to the horizon in a couple of days. Venus will be in the evening sky until the first week of December.

Comet Update: ISON continues to brighten in the morning sky. However, it has moved away from our helpful locator, the planet Mars. It is presently located between the eastern and southeastern horizon and the best time to look is an hour before local sunrise, and with Daylight Savings Time over, that will be a little earlier than it has been.

The comet will pass very close to the bright star Spica in Virgo on Nov. 16-19, which will provide assistance with location. By that time the estimation is it will be a bright, first magnitude object.

**SKY WATCH:** First quarter moon, Sunday, Nov. 10. On that night the moon will be a good aid for finding the planet Neptune. Wait until the sky is good and dark—about an hour or more after local sunset—and look about halfway above the southern horizon. If you place the moon just outside the binocular field of view at the 2:00 position, Neptune will be just outside the field of view at the 7:00 position. Look for a very small, faint blueish dot.

**NEXT WEEK:** The moon helps with Uranus and more astronomical blathering.

