

Stars of March

CELESTIAL TIME TABLE

March 4	4:20 p.m. EDT	Moon in last quarter
	8 11:00 p.m.	Moon passes north of Mars (visible low in east before sunrise)
10	2:10 a.m.	Algol (variable star in Perseus) at minimum brightness
11	1:00 a.m.	Moon farthest, distance 252,700 miles
12	7:47 p.m.	New Moon
	11:00 p.m.	Algol at minimum
15	5:00 p.m.	Moon passes north of Venus
	7:50 p.m.	Algol at minimum
20	4:05 p.m.	Moon in first quarter
21	1:57 a.m.	Sun above equator, spring begins in northern hemisphere
	2:00 p.m.	Moon passes south of Saturn
	10:00 p.m.	Jupiter behind Sun
26	5:00 a.m.	Moon nearest, distance 222,900 miles
27	6:36 a.m.	Full Moon

by James Stokley

Venus, which shines in the west after sunset, is the brightest planet of the March evening sky. Becoming visible while the sky is still quite bright, it sets on March 1 about two hours after the sun, but by the month's end this has increased to nearly three hours. Venus is more than six times as bright as the most prominent star, Sirius, in the southwest in Canis Major.

Saturn is another prominent planet on March evenings, high in the west in the constellation of Gemini. Only about a twenty-fifth as bright as Venus, it exceeds all but four of the stars now visible.

In the first few days of March you may also get a glimpse of Jupiter very low in the western twilight. On March 21

it passes behind the sun and becomes a morning star. During the spring it will shine brightly in the eastern sky before the sun rises.

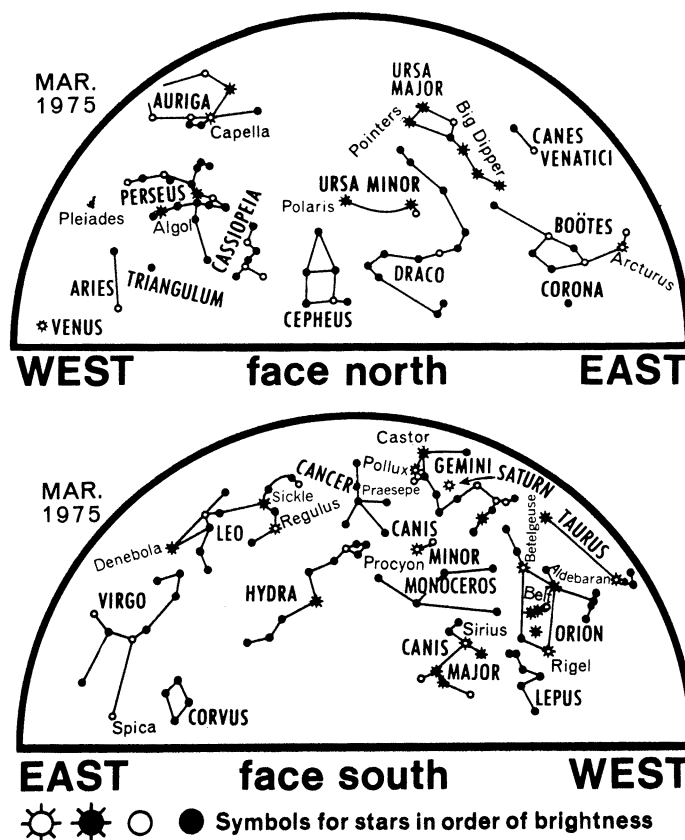
Observers in the United States can now see in the evening sky more bright stars (those of the first magnitude or brighter) than at any other time of year. Fifteen such stars are visible during the year from the parallel of 40° north latitude, which crosses the middle of the nation.

Ten of these are above the horizon at the times for which our March maps are drawn (11 p.m. local DST on March 1 and 9 p.m. on the 31st) although several are quite low. Seven are in the west and southwest, the richest area of the sky for first-magnitude stars.

Two are to the right of Sirius in Orion: Betelgeuse above and Rigel below. Moving

higher and to the right you come to Taurus, with Aldebaran, and then to Auriga, with Capella. In the west, above Saturn, stands Pollux, the brightest star in Gemini, but Saturn is about 2.5 times as bright. Procyon shines in Canis Minor to the south of Gemini and above Canis Major. Look to the east for Leo, for its brightest star, Regulus. Virgo is below Leo but its brightest star, Spica, is near the horizon where atmospheric absorption dims it considerably. This also is true of Arcturus, actually the second brightest star visible these evenings, which is low in the east in Boötes.

At 1:57 a.m., EDT, on March 21, the sun reaches the halfway point in its move northward, an event that is called the equinox and marks the beginning of our spring. □



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