

Sky Highlights for April

April 24	First quarter moon
April 6	Jupiter begins retrograde * (see Notes)
April 2	Full Moon. Called the Egg, Frog, Grass, or Pink Moon
April 10	Last quarter moon
April 21-22	Peak of Lyrid meteor shower.
April 17	New Moon
April 19	Saturn stationary * (see Notes)

Planets

Venus — At magnitude -4 in the west at dusk, moving from Aries to Taurus this month

Jupiter — In the south to south-southwest before dawn at magnitude -2.4

Saturn — High in the east at dusk, moves from southeast to south-southwest throughout the month. Magnitude drops from +0.2 to +0.4 over the month. In Leo. *

*** Notes:**

“Retrograde” and “stationary”:

The superior planets (those that orbit further from the sun than Earth) normally move from west to east against the background stars. As the Earth “catches up” with it, a superior planet appears to slow down, stop (become *stationary*), move backwards (*retrograde motion*), stop again, and resume its original direction. It’s like passing a slower moving car; as you catch up with it, the car appears to stop and move backwards.

Saturn:

The rings are tilted 15° from edgewise. This is the most open they will appear until 2012. As the tilt decreases, the detail in the rings will become less evident. So see the rings as soon as you can!

Sky Highlights for May

May 2	Full Moon. May's full moon is called the Flower, Milk or Planting Moon Mercury at superior conjunction * (see Notes)
May 5-6	Eta Aquarids meteor shower
May 10	Last quarter moon
May 16	New Moon
May 19	Moon and Venus within 1° of each other
May 23	First quarter moon
May 25	Neptune stationary (see Notes for April)
May 27	Moon at apogee * (see Notes)

Planets

Venus— Still dominating western evening sky in Taurus, at magnitude -4.

Mars— At magnitude +1 low in the east-southeast at dawn.

Jupiter— Rising earlier each night as it approaches opposition. At magnitude -2.4.

Saturn— At magnitude +0.4 west of the Sickle in Leo. Watch as it moves in reference to this well-known asterism.

*** Notes:**

“Superior conjunction”:

When a planet passes behind the sun and makes a line with the sun and the Earth. As a planet approaches and passes superior conjunction, it is invisible from Earth either because it is behind the sun (duh!) or because it is so close that it is lost in the sun's glare.