

OCTOBER 2011 ASTRONOMY  
From the Trackman Planetarium at Joliet Junior College

October is the transition month from summer to winter, both with the weather and with the night sky. (Halloween was traditionally a “cross quarter day” celebration, the day halfway between the autumnal equinox and the winter solstice.) The sun is setting earlier each day, and by the end of October the sun has set by 6 pm. (A week later we change the clocks and it will set an hour earlier.) Because darkness comes earlier, the stars of summer are still visible in the west after sunset, while the stars of winter are beginning to appear in the east during mid-evening.

Jupiter is in the sky to the east after sunset. Our orbit is bringing us closer to Jupiter and we will be at our closest (369 million miles) on the 28th. If you have medium to high power binoculars, look at Jupiter and see if you can find the Galilean moons. They will appear as small dots in a line with Jupiter’s equator. And if you have a telescope you never use, now is the time to bring it out and find Jupiter! By month’s end, Venus will be in the western sky after sunset. Venus is the third brightest object in the sky (after the sun and moon) and you will find it easily. Uranus and Neptune are in the evening sky but you need a telescope to see them. Mars is in the sky during the night, located in the constellation of Leo. Saturn will pass behind the sun on the 13th and is too close to the sun for viewing. Cassiopeia, the constellation that looks like a “W” is directly overhead in mid-evening. Below Cassiopeia is the large square of Pegasus and to the right of Pegasus is Cygnus the Swan which is home to Deneb, one of the bright stars of the Summer Triangle. The Milky Way runs through Cassiopeia and Cygnus down to the southwest horizon.

Comet Elenin appears to have disintegrated as it orbited closer to the sun. According to the Chicken Little people, Comet Elenin was suppose to cause havoc to Earth when it made its close approach on October 16th. In reality, it would not have gotten close enough to have any effect on Earth.

The full moon is on October 11th (October 12th Universal Time). The October full moon was known to the Native Americans as the Full Hunter’s Moon, the Blood Moon, or the Sanguine Moon.

The Orionids Meteor Shower peaks on October 21st. These meteors seem to radiate from the direction of Orion and are remnants of Halley’s Comet. Orion is on the eastern horizon by midnight, so any time after midnight should be good meteor hunting. The moon will not be a distracting factor for Orionids meteor watching.

Are you planning on purchasing a telescope for the holiday season? Please ask for our information sheet before you purchase. Some newer telescopes in the medium price range are easy to set up and easy to use. That type of telescope will direct you to any astronomical object you want to see using their onboard computers. Other telescopes on the market - even some computerized telescopes - are poorly designed and difficult to use. We will send you the information you need to make an informed choice.

If your scout group is looking for an educational and entertaining evening, check the programs available at the Trackman Planetarium. Joliet Junior College offers the programs at no charge as a service to our community. For more information, call Christine at 815-280-NOVA between 7:30 am and noon.

“Discover JJC” is on Saturday, November 5th, from 9 am until noon. Come out and visit the campus and see all of the renovations. We will be doing shows at the planetarium during the morning - including one on telescopes at 10:15 am. “Discover JJC” will have representatives from most of our Departments available to discuss what Joliet Junior College has to offer the community. For more information, visit the Discover website:

<http://www.jjc.edu/admissions/Pages/discover-jjc.aspx>  
<<http://sz0010.ev.mail.comcast.net/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://www.jjc.edu/admissions/Pages/discover-jjc.aspx>>

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