



**MARCH 2012**

**EVENING PLANETS:** Mercury (1–17), Venus, Mars, Jupiter,

**MORNING PLANETS:** Mars (1–23), Saturn

**THE SKY** (Mountain Time Zone)

- 1 Moon at greatest northern declination: 22.5° N; 9:13 a.m.
- 3 Mars opposition: 11:54 a.m.
- 8 Full moon: 2:39 a.m.; moonrise, 5:38 p.m.; moonset, 5:35 a.m.
- 10 Moon at perigee: 3:02 a.m.; 225,184 miles from Earth (362,400 km)
- 11 Daylight Saving Time begins: 2:00 a.m.
- 13 Moon at ascending node: 2:41 p.m.
- 14 Moon at greatest southern declination: 22° S; 8:09 a.m.  
Last quarter moon: 7:25 p.m.; moonrise, 12:39 a.m.; moonset, 10:30 a.m.
- 19 Vernal equinox: 11:14 p.m.
- 22 New moon: 8:37 a.m.; moonrise, 6:13 a.m.; moonset, 6:42 p.m.
- 26 Moon at apogee: 12:04 a.m.; 252,152 miles from Earth (405,800 km)
- 27 Moon at descending node: 6:19 p.m.
- 28 Moon at greatest northern declination: 21.9° N; 5:40 p.m.
- 30 First quarter moon: 1:41 p.m.; moonrise, 10:59 a.m.; moonset, 1:13 a.m.

**THE PLANETS**

Mercury can be observed in the western evening sky early in the month. Both the angle of the ecliptic and Mercury's increasing northern heliocentric latitude favor observers in the northern hemisphere. Mercury is at perihelion on the 2nd, and at greatest elongation E (18°) on the 5th. The planet dims rapidly during the second week of March, reaching inferior conjunction on the 21st.

Venus shines with a -4.03 magnitude and can be observed in the western evening sky. Venus lays 3° from Jupiter on the 11th through the 15th. The waxing crescent moon passes 1.8° S of Venus on the 26th, and a day later Venus is at greatest elongation E (46°). At midmonth Venus rises near 9 a.m., transits about 4 p.m., and sets around 11 p.m.

Mars, in Leo, is at opposition on the 3rd, its most distant opposition in the 30-year period of 1996-2026. Its apparent magnitude is -1.2, diameter is 13.9 arc seconds, and is 5.6 light-minutes (0.674 au) from Earth. Look for Mars 10° N of the moon on the 8th. The Martian northern hemisphere summer solstice occurs on the 30th. At midmonth Mars rises near 5:30 p.m., transits about 12:15 a.m., and sets around 7 a.m.

Jupiter, in Aries, can be observed in the western evening sky this month along with Venus. The waxing crescent Moon passes 3° N of Jupiter on the 25th. At midmonth Jupiter rises near 9 a.m., transits about 4 p.m., and sets around 10:45 p.m.

Saturn, retrograding in Virgo, can be observed northeast of the star Spica, rising in midevening. Saturn is 6° N of the moon on the 11th. At midmonth, Saturn rises near 9:45 p.m., transits about 3:15 a.m., and sets around 8:45 a.m.

Uranus is not visible this month as it is in conjunction with the sun on the 24th.

Neptune, in Aquarius, reappears in the morning sky late in the month, but its angle of the ecliptic favors observers in the southern hemisphere.