

Spring constellations are plentiful

In case you haven't noticed, daylight is lasting much longer in the evening and it is getting light earlier in the day.

We have passed the equinox and the Sun is traveling further north on the horizon toward the point of the summer solstice where it will appear to stop moving for a while and then start south again.

So, while we can enjoy the longer days, it does not help the astronomer because there is much less truly "dark" time for observing.

So, while we have it, let's make the most of it.

Tonight the moon and Venus are close together, but not as close as last night, or as close as they have been on previous meetings.

Now, back to our topic at hand, the spring constellations.

We have seen Leo and Cancer. Continuing a little further to the right and slightly up we can find the three, fourth magnitude stars of Coma Berenices, or Berenice's Hair.

It is a small constellation consisting of three stars forming a right angle. Nothing much of note here, except for M64, the Blackeye Galaxy and a nice little globular cluster, M53.

However, between Leo and Coma Berenice, is an area called the "Realm of the Galaxies." Here are located more than a million galaxies.

Our own local group, to which the Milky Way and Andromeda belong, has fewer than 40 members.

A few can be seen with just binoculars, but to really get a view a larger aperture telescope will be needed.

Just below and further right is the grand constellation, Bootes (pronounced BOW-oh-tees) with the bright star Arcturus. Right now, Bootes looks like a kite laying down on its side.

We have discussed before how to find Arcturus, go the the Big Dipper, follow the arc of the handle to Arcturus.

Then you can "speed" on, following the arc, to find Spica, brightest star in Virgo, the Maiden.

Another help for finding Spica right now is the yellowish planet Saturn which is located just up and right of the star. Together they look like a couple of celestial headlights shining in the east at about 9:30 p.m. MDT.

If you do have a telescope, now is a good time to take a look at Saturn. The view of the ringed planet is a sight that will inspire anyone. My first view of Saturn further fanned the fire of my interest in astronomy many years ago.

Now, two more spring constellations. They are very small but still interesting to find. Corvus the Crow, and Crater the Cup. I have discussed both of them in earlier columns, but it is still nice to visit them again.

Look almost due south, below Virgo just above the horizon. Corvus is the one on the left and is sort of square. Crater is on the right and looks like a cup with a square for the bottom and two stars raised above to form the rim of the cup.

SKY WATCH: First quarter moon, Sunday, April 29. Saturday, April 28, is National Astronomy Day. Celebrate by visiting an astronomical facility near you; (there is a very nice planetarium on

the campus of the University of Nebraska, Kearney), you can call for visitation times; subscribe to an astronomy magazine, www.astronomy.com or www.skyandtelescope.com; or if nothing else, hug an astronomer.