

Maybe next year...

By Vernon Whetstone

Amateur Astronomer

Last year it was the moon, this year it was clouds and thunderstorms. Now I will have to wait another year before viewing the Perseid meteor shower.

From the pictures I have been seeing on astronomical web sites, however, not everyone missed the Perseids. At least I am glad someone had a good view.

As they say in Chicago, there is always next year.

As for now, we have the possibility of viewing two planets in the evening and two planets in the morning.

About 9 p.m. MDT look to the southwest for three bright objects almost in a straight line. The one on top is the planet Saturn which we have been watching for the last few months.

The middle one is the planet Mars which we have also been keeping our eyes on; on the bottom is the star Spica, the brightest star in the constellation Virgo.

By the end of the week Mars will move further eastward making the line into a nice triangle.

If you are a morning person, be outside about an hour before sunrise looking east. The brightest thing you will see is the planet Venus.

Venus has about reached maximum distance from the Sun and therefore maximum brightness. Above and right is almost as bright Jupiter, the largest of the planets.

A little to the right and down from Jupiter is Aldebaran, the brightest star in Taurus, the Bull. A binocular view of Aldebaran will show the Hyades star cluster located several light years beyond.

There is the possibility of seeing a third planet, tiny Mercury.

Follow the line down and left from Jupiter past Venus and keep going until just above the horizon. Look for a tiny, bright dot.

Now, as promised, a word about the Summer Triangle. At present it is located almost overhead if you are looking east.

The three stars—Vega, the highest, Deneb to the lower left, and Altair to the lower right. They will soon cross the meridian—the line dividing the eastern sky from the western indicating summer is passing and autumn is on its way.

Another indicator that autumn is approaching can be found in the eastern sky about two hours after sunset. The giant square of the constellation Pegasus. At present it appears as a diamond standing up on one of its corners.

Another seasonal indicator constellations is found in the morning sky. Since you will be out looking at Jupiter and Venus anyway, look below Jupiter and to the right of Venus for our old friend, Orion, the king of the winter sky.