

Astronomy books make the perfect gift

By Vernon Whetstone

Amateur Astronomer

It is that time of year again, when we begin to think about what we will be giving to whom for Christmas.

If you have an astronomy-inclined person on your list, let me give you some suggestions.

First, books are always good. Not every night is good for observing so a nice book to curl up with, or to use in planning an observing session will always come in handy. It is also nice to have a book to help find out what is visible currently.

Let me say up front, I do not receive any financial return from any of these recommendations. They are simply books and resources I have found quite useful in the past.

Most, if not all of these books, can be found on www.amazon.com and doing a search for "astronomy." They also can be ordered on-line.

First, for the experienced astronomer, I would recommend "Nightwatch" by Terrance Dickinson. It is a large, spiral-bound book with astronomical history, maps, and object location guides.

Next is "A Child's Introduction to the Night Sky," by Michael Driscoll and Meredith Hamilton. This is a very good book for the young beginner.

A book I use quite often is "Turn Left at Orion." It contains some very basic instruction and some "down-to-Earth" information.

Another useful book is "Sky and Telescope's Pocket Sky Atlas," which is also available on Amazon.

Or, perhaps you would like to give a gift-subscription to either of the two best-selling astronomy magazines.

You simply point your favorite web browser to www.astronomy.com, or www.skyandtelescope.com, and order a gift-subscription in their name. Either one of those will provide a wealth of information and direction for the aspiring astronomer.

If you would like to take it one step further and look at some basic equipment I would recommend Celestron's "First Scope." It is a small, three-inch, Dobsonian mount scope that is easily transported, set up, and taken down. It can also be found using a search on "astronomy" on Amazon.

One word though about the telescope, after reading the reviews of the scope most said the eyepieces were not the best choice. They worked for the scope they were on, but there were possibly better eyepieces available.

If you would like to order the telescope, I would recommend you read the reviews.

There is a wealth of material out there for the astronomer, or someone interested in getting started in the hobby, all you need to do is look.

SKY WATCH: Full moon today, Wednesday, Nov. 28. If you missed Monday and Tuesday's

close conjunction of Venus and Saturn in the pre-dawn sky, there is still hope. At present they are visible within the same binocular field of view. The tiny, bright dot down and to their left is the closest planet to the Sun, Mercury.

Mercury will be around for another week or so getting higher above the horizon each morning until Dec. 4, when it will be at its farthest from the Sun. Be out and looking about a half-hour to 45-minutes before local sunrise.

Another interesting line-up will be on Sunday morning, Dec. 2, and Monday morning, Dec. 3 when Venus, Saturn, and Mercury, all line up in a straight line following the ecliptic down to the horizon. They will be about equal distance apart.

NEXT WEEK: More astronomical blathering.