

The Street Astronomer's Guide to the Planets for Summer 2011

The Sun

The sun is 865,000 miles in diameter. On a scale of one yard equals one million miles, the sun is 31 inches across (about the size of a beach ball).

Zodiacal Light

The Zodiacal Light is not visible until September. Begin looking for it in the east an hour or more before sunrise on the 5th. It will be visible for the next two weeks from a dark location.

Mercury

Mercury is usually a difficult planet to see as it never travels very far from the sun. The innermost planet makes a minor appearance on the evenings of late June and early July. Look for it as the only star above the west-northwest horizon as soon as it is getting dark (but before it gets completely dark). A better opportunity to see Mercury takes place in early September. Then look for the planet as the first noticeable star above the eastern horizon about 30 minutes before sunrise. Mercury, when visible, appears as a white star. (At our scale, Mercury is 36 yards away from the sun and 1/10 inches in diameter)

Venus

The Morning Star is visible in the east 30 minutes before sunrise in June. For the rest of the summer, Venus is too close to the sun to be visible. In color, Venus is a brilliant white.

(At our scale, Venus is 67 yards away from sun and ¼ of an inch in diameter)

Earth

Summer (the summer solstice) begins on June 21, 2011.

(At our scale, Earth is 93 yards from the sun and ¼ of an inch in diameter)

Mars

The Red Planet is a morning planet this summer. Mars does not appear very bright since it is located on the other side of the solar system. In color, it is a pale yellow-orange.

Look for close passages between Mars and the crescent moon on the morning of June 28th, July 27th, and August 25th. Mars is a slightly orange-yellow star above the brighter orange-yellow star Regulus.

(At our scale, Mars is 140 yards away from sun and 1/8 inches in diameter)

Jupiter

The King of the Planets rises in the east-northeast at 3:00 AM in June. By the end of summer its rises by 9:00 PM. Jupiter is the second brightest planet and appears as the

brightest star in the southeast before the sun rises. Jupiter appears pale yellow in color. Binoculars (if held steady) will show the retinue of its four largest satellites.
(At our scale, Jupiter is .27 miles away from the sun and 2.75 inches in diameter)

Saturn

The solar system's ringed jewel is visible overhead after it gets dark and is visible until the end of summer. Saturn forms a triangle overhead with the stars Arcturus and Spica. Saturn is golden yellow in color. It's brighter than most stars, but fainter than usual because its rings are not turned very far from edge on.
(At our scale, Saturn ½ miles away from the sun and 2.3 inches in diameter)