



# Sudekum Planetarium

## May 2008

10:00 p.m. on May 1  
 9:00 p.m. on May 15  
 8:00 p.m. on June 1

**To use this chart:** hold the chart in front of you and turn it so the direction you are facing is at the bottom of the chart.

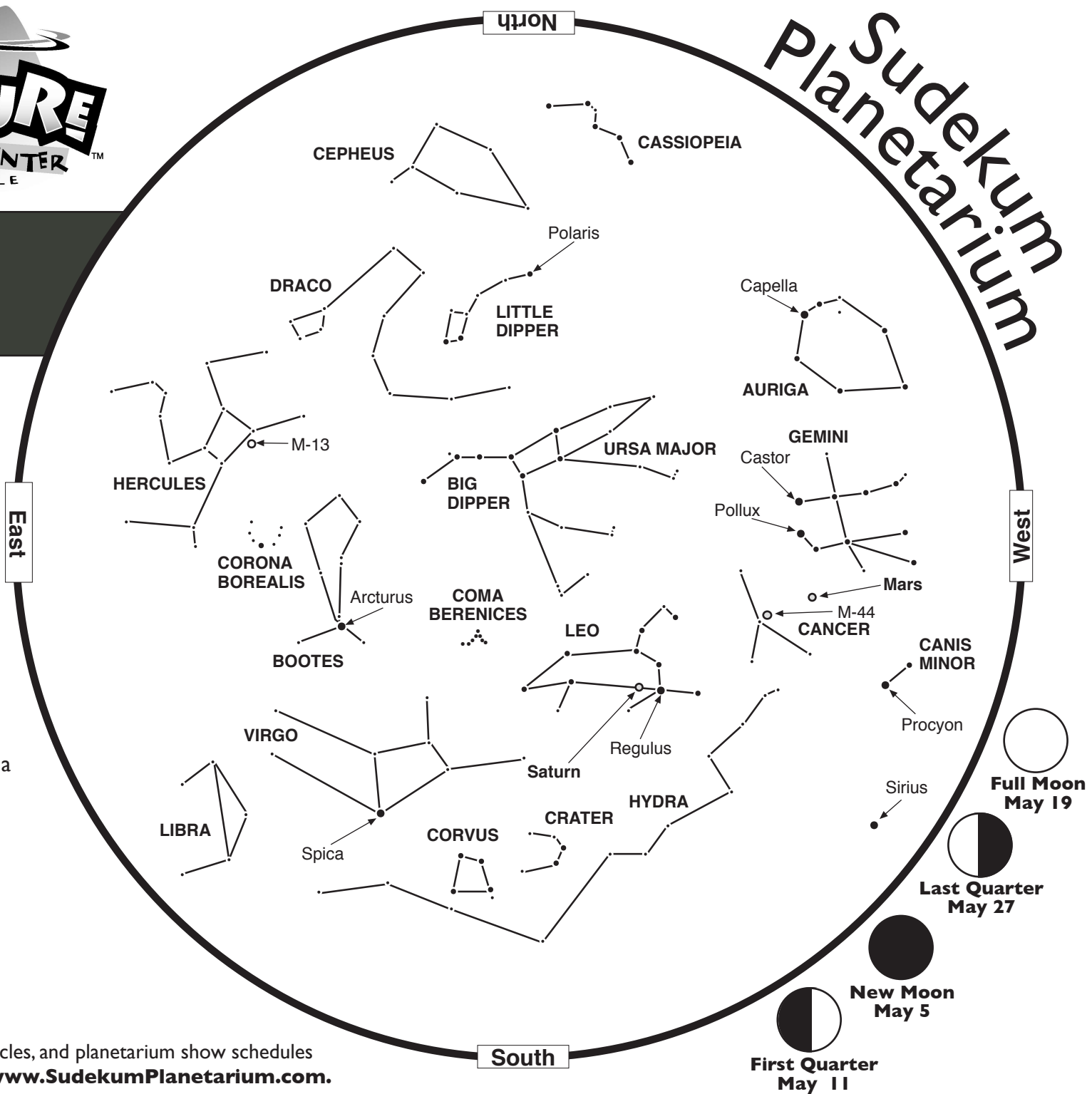
- **Bright Stars**
- **Medium Bright Stars**
- **Faint Stars**

**Scan the sky with binoculars:** the darker the sky, the better.

**• Open Star Clusters:**

- M-44 - The Beehive Cluster
- M-13 - The Hercules Cluster
- Coma Berenices is a star cluster and a constellation.

From Nashville:		
	Sunrise	Sunset
May 1	5:54 AM	7:35 AM
May 15	5:41 AM	7:47 AM
June 1	5:31 AM	7:59 AM





May 2008

## April Showers Bring May Flowers And Clear Skies?

Rain or shine, the sweet smells of spring abound this month. If you can find some clear weather this time of year, take the time to enjoy to the festive sights visible in the night sky.

Mars has been hanging around in the constellation **Gemini the twins** for the last two months, but it moves into **Cancer the crab** on May 5. Unfortunately, the distance between Earth and Mars is pretty far right now, and increasing daily. So, Mars does not appear very bright in our evening sky. Still, you have a chance to see Mars pass in front of **M-44, the Beehive Cluster**, just after midnight on **Thursday, May 22**. Together, they will make a pretty sight through binoculars or a small telescope with low magnification.

**Saturn** is the pale yellow star near the bright star **Regulus** in **Leo the lion**, sitting high in the southwestern sky after sunset. Seen through a telescope, Saturn is one of the most beautiful sights in the sky. It's a popular request at star parties!

During the first half of the month, be sure to get out and look for **Mercury** shining brightly in the western sky just after sunset. Being the closest planet to the **Sun**, Mercury never fully escapes the glow of our star. However, this is a good month to look for this elusive planet. On **May 14th**, Mercury reaches **greatest eastern elongation**, which simply means that as the Sun sets in the west, Mercury is

as far east of the Sun as it can get. It's higher in the sky, further away from the Sun's glow, and much more easily visible.

Watch for it in the west-northwest as the sky begins to darken, around 8:30 p.m. Depending on how low and flat your local horizon is in that direction, you may see it as late as 9:30 p.m. before it sets. If you don't see it at first, scan the sky with binoculars. Once you know where to look, it may be easier to spot with the naked eye.

Every day past the 14th, Mercury speeds back toward the Sun. By the beginning of June it will be completely lost in the Sun's glare.

Stay up late for a look at **Jupiter**. The giant planet rises in the east before 1 a.m. at the beginning of May, and before 11 p.m. at the end of the month. It shines very brightly and will be hard to miss!

With four planets in the evening sky, early birds may feel left out. **Venus**, which has dominated the predawn sky for several months, is now very difficult to spot as it appears closer to the glow of sunrise. To see it all this month, you'll need a clear eastern horizon, good timing, and a sharp eye.

Don't despair, though! Early risers will still get a good look at Jupiter, which will stay visible until it's obscured by the morning light.

## Phoenix Lands

Mars returns to the news again on **May 25** when the **Phoenix** lander is scheduled to touch down on the surface of the red planet.

Unlike the famous rovers **Spirit** and **Opportunity** which still roam the surface, Phoenix will stay put where it lands. Its mission is to search for water ice beneath the surface, so it's built not to roll, but to dig. Scientists hope to learn more about the geologic history of Mars and whether life could have ever existed there.

Scientists and engineers at NASA have selected an appropriate landing site on Mars, and are working

with images taken by the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter to find the safest spot to touch down. They don't want it to land on a boulder!

The landing area is a broad, flat valley nicknamed "Green Valley." It's not really green at all, but scientists expect to find a layer of permafrost just underneath the surface. Phoenix will examine frozen water and soil, in an attempt to dig up more clues about Mars' past.

The primary mission of Mars Phoenix is expected to last about three months. To learn more about the mission, visit:

<http://phoenix.lpl.arizona.edu/>

## Astronomy Day in May

**Saturday, May 17, 2008**, is **Astronomy Day** at the Adventure Science Center. A variety of activities will be available from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Members of the **Barnard-Seyfert Astronomical Society** and the **Austin Peay Amateur Astronomers** will be on hand with telescopes on display and friendly folks to explain how anyone and everyone can enjoy the night sky.

At 10:30 a.m., **Dr. Chuck Higgins** from Middle Tennessee State University will give a presentation on Mercury and discoveries made by the MESSENGER spacecraft that flew the planet in January 2008.

**Dr. Charles Magruder** from Western Kentucky University will give a talk at 1:30 p.m. on the search for planets orbiting other stars, known as extrasolar planets.

Adventure Science Center closes at 5:00 p.m., but the fun resumes from 8:30 to 10:30 p.m. for a **FREE public star party**. Telescopes and their owners that were in the Science Center during the day will head out to the parking lot to provide visitors with stunning views of Saturn, the Moon, and other spring treats.

Remember that star parties are **weather permitting**. If the weather is cloudy or worse, the star party may be cancelled. Please check our web site or call AstroLine at 615-401-5092 before traveling.

*For information about programs and events at the Sudekum Planetarium and Adventure Science Center, visit [www.SudekumPlanetarium.com](http://www.SudekumPlanetarium.com)*

*For current night sky information, call AstroLine at 615-401-5092.*