



**April 2009**

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

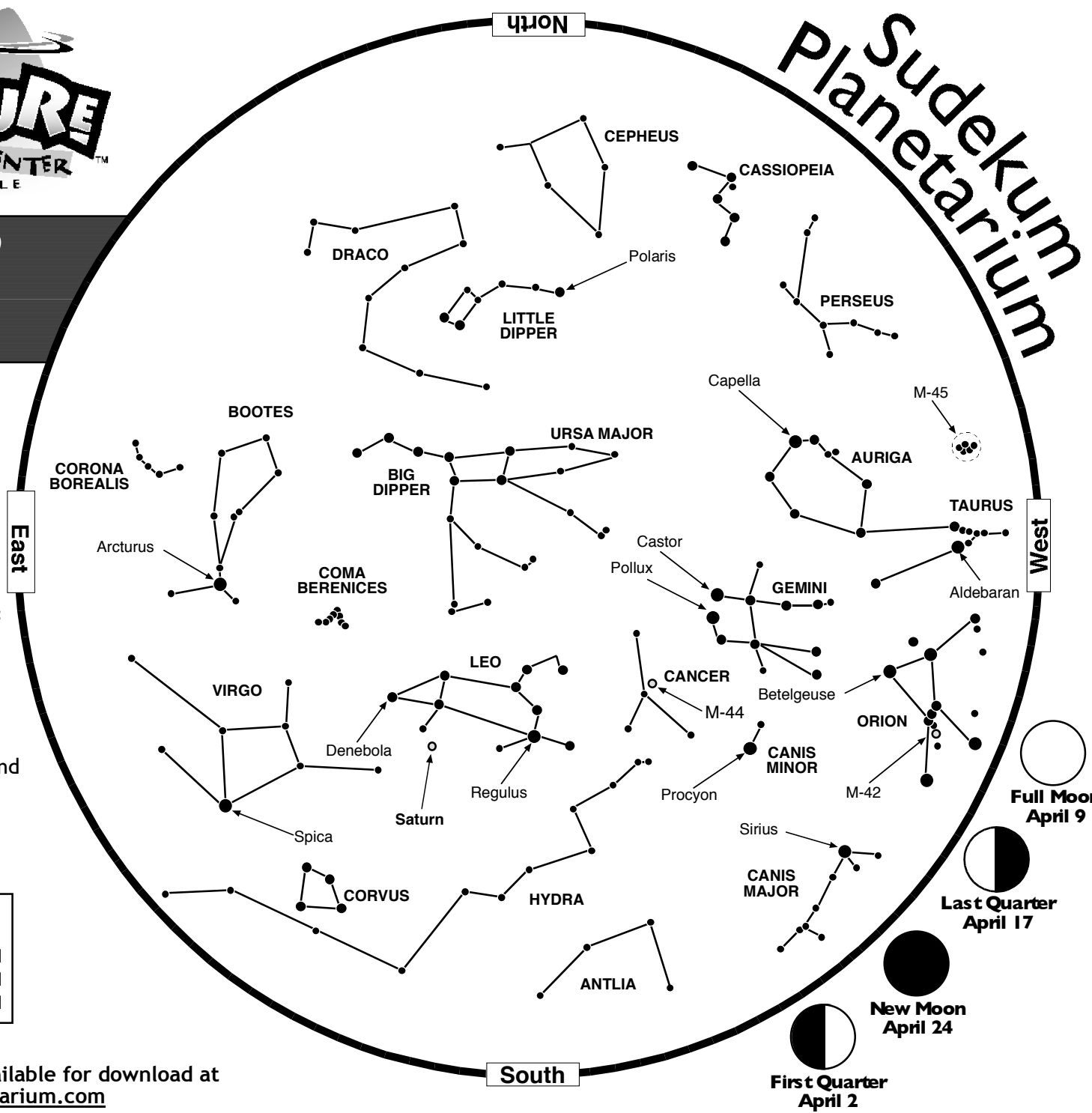
- M-44 - The Beehive
- M-45 - The Pleiades
- Coma Berenices is a star cluster and a constellation.

**• Nebulas:**

- M-42 - The Orion Nebula

From Nashville:

	Sunrise	Sunset
April 1	6:33 AM	7:09 PM
April 15	6:14 AM	7:21 PM
May 1	5:54 AM	7:35 PM



FREE monthly star charts are available for download at [www.SudekumPlanetarium.com](http://www.SudekumPlanetarium.com)

— THE NEW —  
**SUDEKUM  
PLANETARIUM**  
AT ADVENTURE SCIENCE CENTER

**April 2009**

**April Showers Bring  
Lions and Dippers and Bears**

Spring is here. Leaves have reappeared on the trees, temperatures are much more reasonable, and the stars of winter are low in the west after sunset. The time has come to bid **Orion the hunter** and his two faithful dogs, **Canis Major** and **Canis Minor**, a fond farewell until late fall.

As the bright stars of winter sink lower each evening, the modest stars of spring rise to the occasion. During the spring, you'll need a clear, dark, moonless night to see any constellations because these fainter stars cannot compete with either light pollution or the big, bright Moon.

Once the sky has darkened, start looking for **Leo the lion** high in the southern sky. The bright star **Regulus** marks the heart of the lion. North of **Regulus** is a curving arc of stars that looks like a backwards question mark or maybe the hook of a coat hanger. This represents the head and mane of the lion.

An irregular rectangle indicates the body of the lion with a triangle at the lion's rear end. The name of the star, **Denebola**, means "tail of the lion."

If you are having trouble seeing the mighty king of beasts lying up there in the sky, feel free to imagine the stars of **Leo** differently. Perhaps the stars of **Leo** look to you more like a mouse than a lion. **Denebola** marks the tip of the mouse's curious nose. The triangle is his pointy head. The rectangle is the body of the mouse, and the hook is the long curly tail. Same stars, different picture.

Spring is also the best time to look for the **Big and Little Dippers** because they appear high above the northern horizon after sunset.

The seven stars of the **Big Dipper** can be seen in the northeast, even with some light pollution, but the stars of the **Little Dipper** are much fainter. You will have to hunt for **Polaris** or the two stars on the outside of the bowl. Consider the **Little Dipper** a 'challenge' object, and please do not give up stargazing if you have a hard time seeing it from home.

Even the planets can be a bit challenging this month. **Saturn** will appear as a faint star just below the body of **Leo**. For being the second largest planet in our solar system, it's not as bright as you might expect. From Earth, we are currently seeing the rings edge-on. As Earth and Saturn orbit the Sun, this alignment happens roughly every fifteen years. Without sunlight reflected from the surface of the rings, Saturn appears much dimmer than usual.

This April provides a great opportunity to check the closest planet to the Sun off your "to-do" list. **Mercury** makes a brief appearance above the western horizon after sundown.

On **April 10, just 15 minutes after sunset**, scan the sky seven to ten degrees above where the Sun disappeared. Mercury should be visible as a bright point of light in the twilight sky. When looking for Mercury, try scanning the sky with binoculars first. Once you've found it, try to spot it with your unaided eyes.

Each evening Mercury will be slightly higher above the horizon after sunset. The best night to catch Mercury will be **April 26**, when it stands 16 degrees above the horizon 15 minutes after sunset. A thin **crescent Moon** will be hanging just above Mercury to help you find this elusive planet. After this date, Mercury will begin to fade as it drops into the sunset glow each night.

Earlybirds can find two more planets in the predawn sky. **Venus** is by far the brightest and will be joined by a **crescent Moon** on the morning of **April 22**.

**Jupiter** is not nearly as bright as Venus but can be fairly easily spotted above and some distance to the right of Venus. On **April 19**, the Moon will pass close by Jupiter.

**Look at the Real Sky!**



When you visit the Sudekum Planetarium, you may oooh and aaah at our beautiful starfield, but we want you to go out and take a look at the real night sky from your own backyard.

You can also join us for FREE public star parties throughout the year. At these events, members of the **Barnard-Seyfert Astronomical Society** set up their telescopes so anyone can enjoy viewing Saturn, a star cluster, or a nebula. The best part: it's all FREE!

The next public star party is set for **Friday, April 3, 2009, from 8-10 PM**, at **Adventure Science Center**. Another one is scheduled for the next evening, **Saturday, April 4, from 8-10 PM**, at the **Special Events field at Edwin Warner Park**. A third is scheduled for **Saturday evening, May 2, from 8:30-10:30 PM** at the **Visitor Information Center at Longhunter State Park**. Directions to all these sites are available on our website.

Be sure to check the Sudekum Planetarium web site for helpful hints on enjoying a star party. Please note that star parties may be cancelled due to poor weather. If the weather is questionable, visit our web site or call **AstroLine** at (615) 401-5092 before leaving home.

**The Amazing Telescope**

In 1609, Galileo turned his first small telescope to the sky. As we celebrate the anniversary of his achievements, **400 Years of the Telescope** airs on PBS stations around the country this month. Locally it airs at **9:00 PM, April 16** on **WNPT Channel 8**.

A companion planetarium show, **Two Small Pieces of Glass** is showing this month at the Sudekum Planetarium as part of our usual **Skies Over Nashville** program. Take a brief tour of the current night sky. Then discover how telescopes have changed our view of the universe. Visit our web site for details and a schedule of show times.