

Welcome to Nightwatch, The Adler Planetarium's monthly sky-watching guide for February 2012.



## FEATURED THIS MONTH

**VENUS** and **JUPITER**, the brightest objects (except the Moon and occasionally some satellites) in the night sky, will look as though they are moving closer together this month. Keep in mind that, even though they may *look* close in the night sky, they are in reality about 500 million miles apart. Their comparative brightnesses are due to their distances from the Earth and their actual sizes. Venus is the closest planet to Earth; it's slightly smaller than Earth, and its orbit is closer to the Sun. Jupiter is many times the size of the Earth, and its orbit around the Sun is further out than the orbit of the Earth.



## PLANET WATCH

Evenings this month, the bright planets **VENUS** and **JUPITER** outshine the stars in the southwest skies. Venus is lower in the sky but the brighter of the two planets. A waxing crescent Moon is near Venus the evening of the 25th and near Jupiter the evening of the 26th. At the start of the month, the two planets appear to be about 40 degrees apart; but as the evenings pass, they seem to move closer together. By month's end, they appear only 12 degrees apart.

The planet **MARS** rises in the east about 9:00 p.m. Central time at the start of the month, and by 6:30 p.m. by month's end. It's about 20 degrees east of the "Sickle"-shaped asterism in the constellation **LEO**. Mars crosses the southern skies each night and sets in the west as dawn is brightening the sky.

The planet **SATURN** rises in the east-southeast around midnight at the start of the month, around 10:00 p.m. by month's end. Before dawn on the 12th, the bright star **SPICA**, in the constellation Virgo, appears between Saturn and a waning gibbous Moon.

The last week of this month offers some of the year's best evening viewing of the hard-to-spot planet **MERCURY**. It's very low in the west-southwest and sets only about one hour after the Sun.



## MOON WATCH

The Full Moon is on the 7th, the Last Quarter Moon is on the 14th, the New Moon is on the 21st, and the First Quarter Moon is on the 29th.

Thanks for reading *Nightwatch*, updated monthly with the assistance of Starry Night software. To learn more about this month's sky, visit us on the web, at [www.adlerplanetarium.org/investigate/skywatch/](http://www.adlerplanetarium.org/investigate/skywatch/). For astronomy news on the go, download the *Adler Night and Day* podcast. To subscribe to Adler's podcast series, go to [www.adlerplanetarium.org/podcasts](http://www.adlerplanetarium.org/podcasts) or, search for *Adler Night and Day* on iTunes.