



She's beautiful. She's radiant. She's mysterious. She commands attention and holds it.

Who can avert their gaze from the early morning blaze this month that is the lovely planet, Venus?

I arose early one morning, stepped out on my deck just before dawn and noticed this sparkling beauty in the eastern sky. But something wasn't quite right. I hauled my scope out onto the deck and was rewarded with the slender crescent of Venus. Only a year ago, I hadn't even realized Venus had phases (I should have known; just like a woman). But there she was, a tiny, glimmering, moon-like crescent, almost too dazzling to behold.

The month of October holds many more beautiful celestial sights. As the weather and the season turns, the sky comes into crisper focus. So don a sweater and – enjoy the dawn!

This month's blog post is targeted at the morning's astronomical offerings. If you're not a morning person, you should reconsider. Double-up on your coffee if need be. I'm going to try to convince you why. And if I can't do it, surely the gorgeous Venus might seduce you to arise earlier than normal.

This month is the time to do it. Haul your butt out of bed because in October, the expression "rise and shine" reaches a whole new level. You take care of the rise part; the planets Mercury, Venus, and Jupiter will take care of the shine.

And let's face it: most of us are *crazy* about shiiiiiny things!

Here are some highlights:

On the 16th, Mercury makes a rare appearance low in the eastern sky just before sunrise (6:39 a.m.). This is the highest it's going to get, so take advantage of the opportunity to see this shy inner planet.

Three planetary jewels, Mars, Venus, and Jupiter will appear very close together in the east just before sunrise from mid-October to mid-November. The group appears as a trio changing places throughout that time. Mars and Jupiter are close to each other Oct 17&18, Venus and Jupiter Oct 25 and Venus and Mars on Nov 2&3. Note that Venus is the brightest, then Jupiter and the faintest, Mars has a slightly reddish tint.

From October 22 to October 28, you have a final chance for some truly spectacular celestial bling when Venus, Mars, and Jupiter form a rare, three-planet conjunction (grouping). Like a beautiful three-jewel pendant, the three planets will be closest together during that time. The spacing will be tight enough that a 3-degree circle, a bit bigger than your outstretched thumb, will cover them. Look east before the sun comes up around 7 am.

So forget expensive diamonds and rubies and set your alarms to appreciate the most dazzling gems of all – our beguiling planetary neighbours.

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