

MAY 2026

11:00 pm on May 1
 10:00 pm on May 15
 9:00 pm 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 dark skies with binoculars:

- M-13: The Hercules Cluster
- M-44: The Beehive Cluster
- M-57: The Ring Nebula

It's spring! The days have been getting longer ever since the first day of winter, and will continue to lengthen until the first day of summer, June 21.

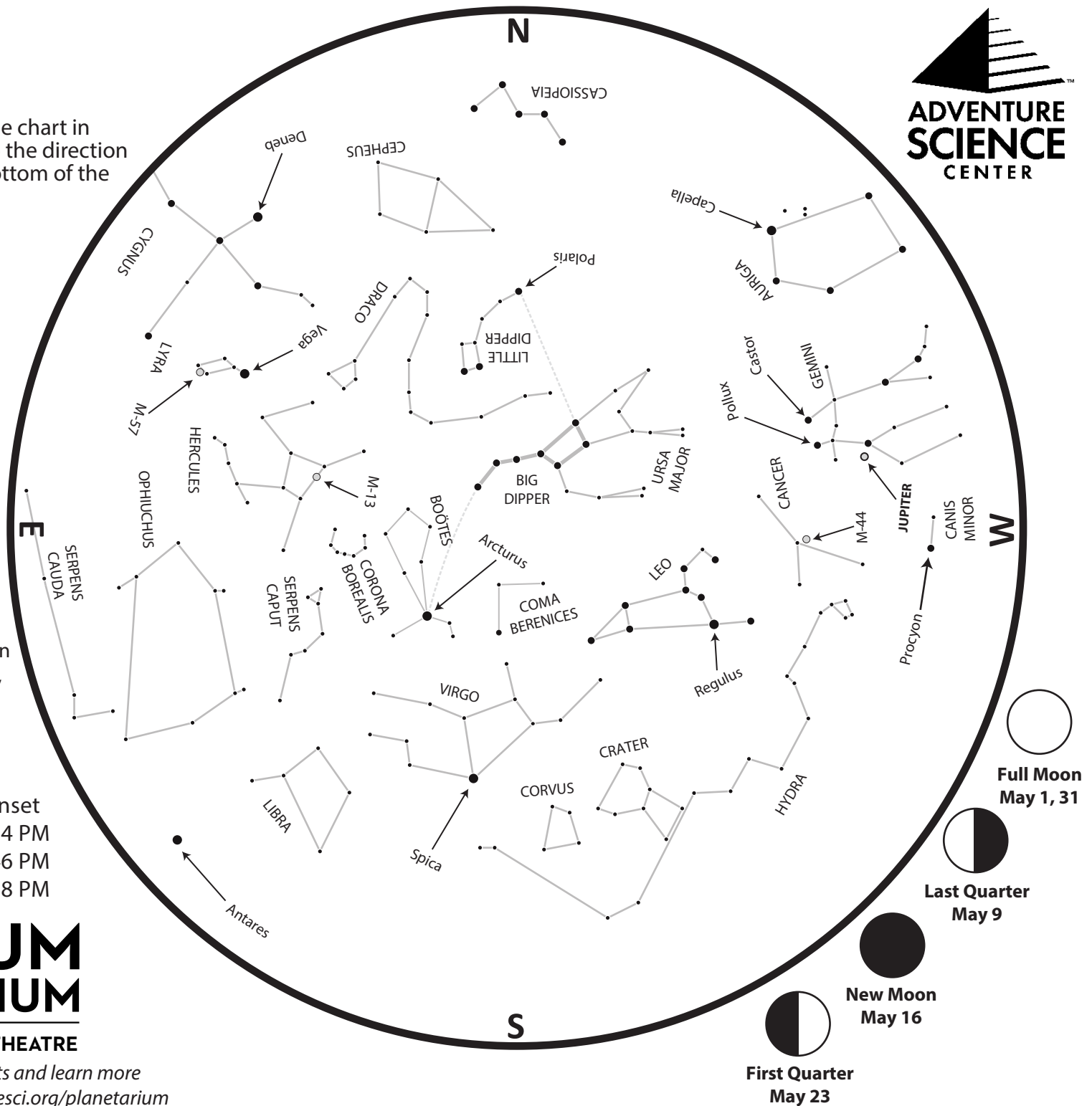
From Nashville:

	Sunrise	Sunset
May 1	5:55 AM	7:34 PM
May 15	5:41 AM	7:46 PM
June 1	5:31 AM	7:58 PM

SUDEKUM PLANETARIUM

JUDITH PAYNE TURNER THEATRE

Download monthly star charts and learn more about our shows at adventuresci.org/planetarium



MAY 2026

After Sunset

As the sky begins to darken, look for **Venus**. This bright planet will appear low in the west at sunset through mid-August. Look quickly, as it may hide behind trees or buildings in your area not long after the Sun sets. It will set later each night.

Once you've found Venus, look higher in the sky for **Jupiter**. The giant planet will set earlier each night and will be lost in the glow of sunset by mid-June. Take a peek through a telescope to see Jupiter's faint cloud bands and up to four of its largest moons.

Keep an eye on the relative positions of Venus and Jupiter over the next several weeks. Each night the two planets will gradually appear closer. They will pass by each other in early June.

Look for a thin crescent Moon near Venus on May 18. The next night, look for the Moon between Venus and Jupiter.

Jupiter appears just below and to the left of the star **Pollux**, one of the two brightest stars of **Gemini the Twins**. The other star, **Castor**, is just to the right of Pollux as you face west.

Look high in the north for the **Big Dipper**. As famous as the Dipper is, it's not always easily visible from our latitude in Tennessee. During the autumn, it stays hidden near the northern horizon, only to emerge in the wee hours of the morning. But in the spring, the Dipper is easy to find, almost straight overhead after sunset.

The Big Dipper is not officially a constellation; it's what astronomers sometimes call an **asterism**. The Big Dipper is a familiar name for this pattern of stars, especially known to observers in the United States, but it's not one of the 88 constellations recognized by astronomers worldwide. **Ursa Major the Great Bear** is the official constellation here, but you'll need dark skies to see its fainter stars.

Use the two stars at the end of the Dipper's bowl to lead you to **Polaris**, also known as the **North Star**. Polaris is not a particularly bright star, but it does remain fixed in the sky throughout the night and throughout the year. When you face the North Star, you're facing due north. Polaris is at the end of the handle of the **Little Dipper**. This group of stars is also officially known as **Ursa Minor the Little Bear**.

Imagine poking a hole in the bottom of the Dipper to let the water drip out. The water falls onto the back of **Leo**

the **Lion**. The head and mane of the lion are represented by a group of stars that looks something like a backwards question mark. Other stargazers imagine the top hook of a coat hanger, or a sickle in this group of stars. The "dot" at the bottom of the question mark is **Regulus**, the brightest star in Leo. It represents the regal heart of the lion.

Follow the curved handle of the Big Dipper to trace the 'arc' to **Arcturus**, the orange colored star in **Boötes the Herdsman**. Then speed on to **Spica**, the single bright star in **Virgo the Maiden**, low in the southeast. Neither of these constellations has any other bright stars. Even under dark skies away from city lights, it's hard to imagine these mythological figures just by connecting the dots.

From Dark Skies

Bright outdoor lighting can make it hard to see all but the brightest stars. Even a bright Moon can make it difficult to see the fainter objects in the sky. On a clear night, find a dark spot far away from city lights, give your eyes time to adjust to the dark, and look for even more celestial sights.

Look between the constellations Leo and Gemini to find... nothing? Even under dark skies you'll have to look closely to spot the famous but faint constellation **Cancer the Crab**, shaped like an upside-down letter Y.

Near the center of Cancer is **M-44**, the **Beehive Cluster**. This **open star cluster** is a great target for binoculars. Open star clusters are collections of up to hundreds of thousands of young stars formed inside giant clouds of gas called nebulae. Over the course of hundreds of millions of years, these stars will drift apart. Open clusters often have irregular shapes. Perhaps the most famous open star cluster is **M-45**, the **Pleiades**, easy to spot in the winter sky.

For an entirely different type of star cluster, look for the constellation **Hercules**, below Boötes as you face east. Four of the stars make a trapezoid shape called the **Keystone**, named after the top stone of a stone arch. Use binoculars to scan the area for **M-13**, the **Hercules cluster**. Use the front of this star chart to help pinpoint where to look.

M-13 is an example of a **globular star cluster**. These are much larger, denser, and further away than open star clusters. The word globular refers to their shape: spherical, like a globe. Globular clusters can be found arranged in a halo surrounding our galaxy in all directions.

The Hercules cluster is over 11 billion years old, 22,000 light years away, and contains as many as half a million stars.

Early Morning

As Earth orbits the Sun throughout the year, the constellations rise and set just a little bit earlier every day. You won't see much difference from night to night, but you will over the course of weeks or months. What we see in today's pre-dawn sky is a preview of the early evening sky in later months. Go out before dawn this month for a look ahead at the summer evening sky.

Leo the Lion has long since set. High in the east are **Vega**, **Deneb**, and **Altair**, the three bright stars that make up the **Summer Triangle**. To the southwest is the J-shaped **Scorpius the Scorpion**, with the red star **Antares** near its center. Just to the left of Scorpius is Sagittarius the Archer, which to modern observers might look more like a teapot.

From dark skies you can trace the path of the **Milky Way** from Scorpius, through the Summer Triangle, and on towards the W-shaped constellation **Cassiopeia the Queen** low in the northeast.

If you have a clear eastern horizon, you might just catch **Saturn** rising before the Sun. It will get easier to spot later in the month as it continues to rise earlier each morning. Look for a thin crescent Moon just above Saturn on the morning of May 13.

Before you set your alarm for the wee hours of the morning, consider planning out your observing. Desktop planetarium software like the free, open-source Stellarium (stellarium.org) can show you more precisely where night sky objects can be found on any date and time, and help you plan ahead.

This month in the Sudekum Planetarium
Judith Payne Turner Theatre

NIGHTWATCH
PRESENTED BY
asurion

DREAM TO FLY

MARS
THE ULTIMATE VOYAGE