

Evening Planets: Mercury joins Venus at dusk.

Mercury passes 1.1° to the north (right) of Venus on March 3. Mercury reaches greatest elongation March 15, then swiftly fades and drops back down, disappearing into twilight within a week. Venus continues to slowly climb higher in evening twilight. Venus passes within 0.1° of Uranus on Mar. 28, but the 6th-mag planet will be lost in twilight.

Morning Planets: Saturn, Mars, and Jupiter remain part of the morning skies. Mars is moving closer to the ringed planet and farther from Jupiter while Saturn and Jupiter remain about 45° apart. Look southward at dawn to see these three planets. Every 20 years, Jupiter passes Saturn. The next time this will happen is late in 2020. From now until then, watch as Jupiter slowly closes the gap on Saturn. Each day in March, Mars is 900,000 miles nearer to us. On March 1, Mars is 1.40 AU or 130 million miles from Earth. On March 31, Mars is 1.11 AU or 103 million miles away. Its brightness increases from mag +0.8 to +0.3.

Watch for the **zodiacal light** in the west just after end of evening twilight during March 3-18. Zodiacal light is caused by interplanetary dust particles reflecting the Sun's light. It appears to the unaided eye as a cone of light extending up from the horizon, with its axis along the ecliptic plane. A very dark sky is needed to spot the elusive glow.

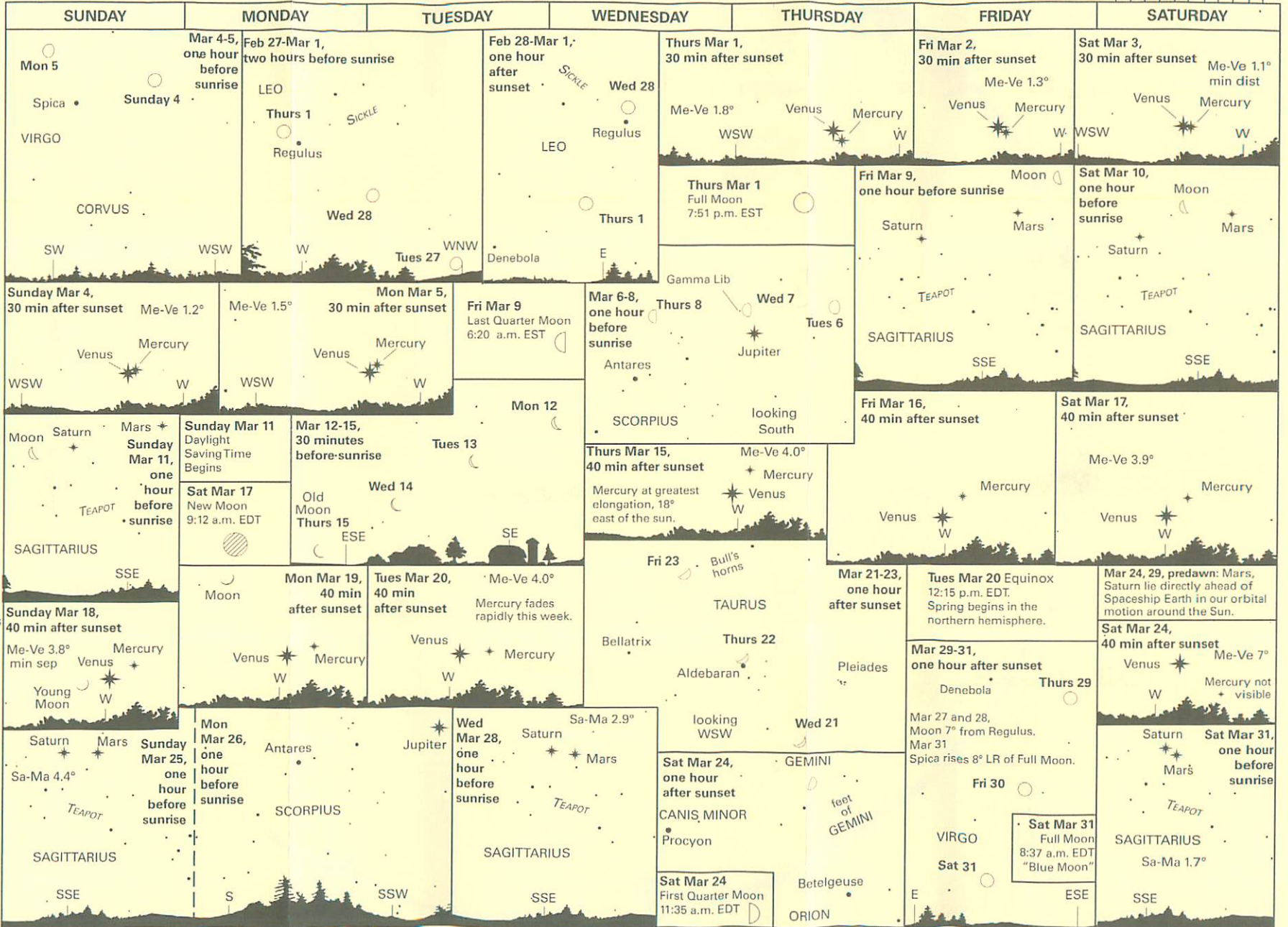
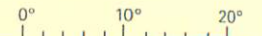
The **second Full Moon of the month is March 31, 8:37 a.m. EDT.** Second Full Moons within one month are often referred to as Blue Moons. The Moon will not appear blue. The last Blue Moon was in January of this year. The next one will be October 2020. Another definition of a Blue Moon is the third Full Moon in a season with four Full Moons. The next one of these seasonal Blue Moons is May 18, 2019.

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SKY CALENDAR MARCH 2018

An aid to enjoying the changing sky

Use this scale to measure angular distances between objects on diagrams below.



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ISSN 0733-6314

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March Evening Skies

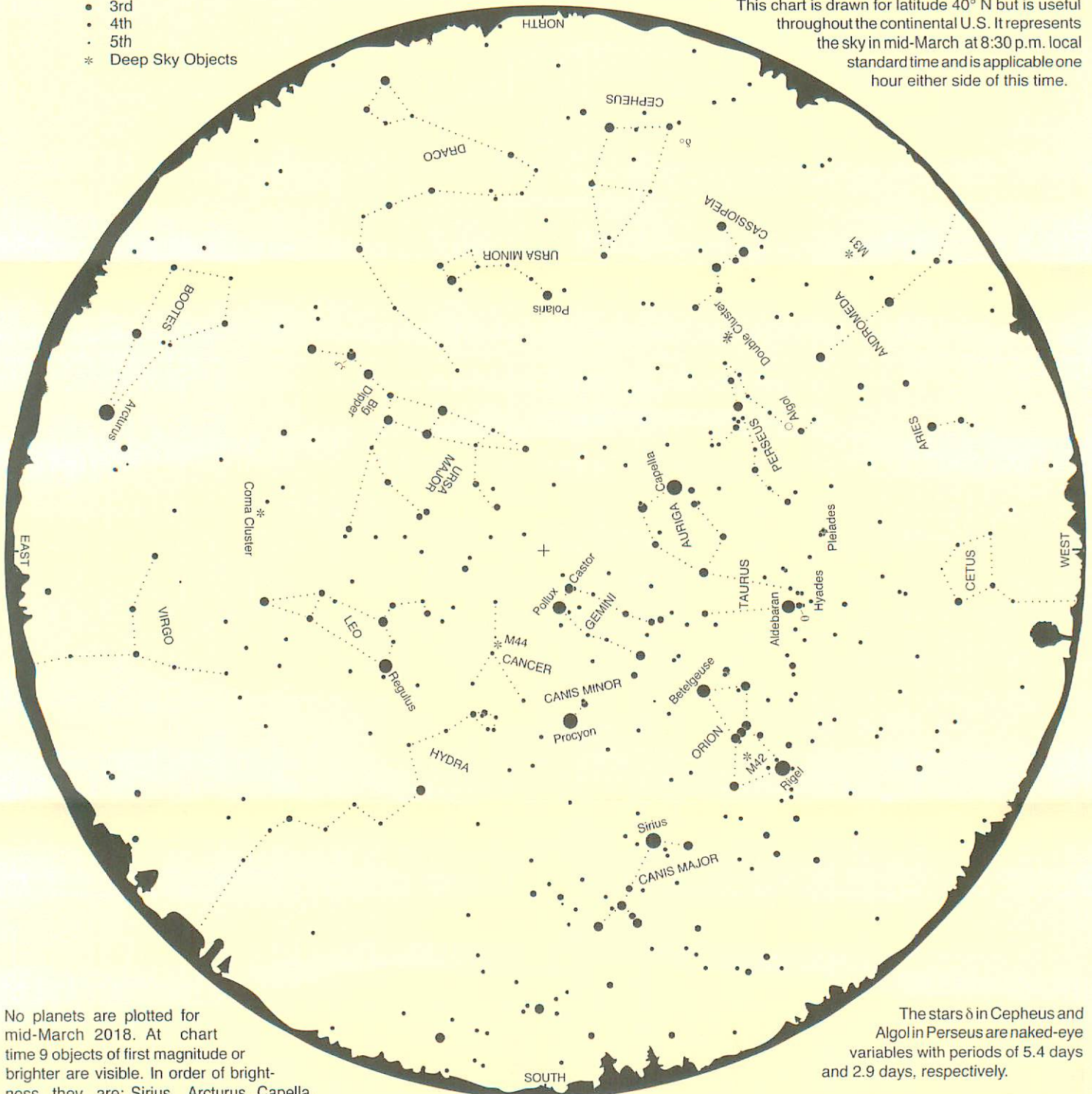
LEGEND Star Magnitudes

- Zero or brighter
- 1st
- 2nd
- 3rd
- 4th
- 5th
- * Deep Sky Objects

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This chart is drawn for latitude 40° N but is useful throughout the continental U.S. It represents the sky in mid-March at 8:30 p.m. local standard time and is applicable one hour either side of this time.



No planets are plotted for mid-March 2018. At chart time 9 objects of first magnitude or brighter are visible. In order of brightness they are: Sirius, Arcturus, Capella, Rigel, Procyon, Betelgeuse, Aldebaran, Pollux, and Regulus.

Our usual monthly maps are designed for stargazers just beginning to find their way around the sky. This month's map is useful for serious stargazing from dark locations. It contains many more stars, inclusive to magnitude 4.5, and some fainter stars as needed to complete patterns or assist in locating special objects.

A selection of double stars (labeled with Greek letters) and "deep sky objects" is also plotted. All are visible with modest equipment; most are within the range of the unaided eye or binoculars.

The double stars, in order of decreasing angular separation, are ζ in Ursa Major, and θ in Taurus.

The stars δ in Cepheus and Algol in Perseus are naked-eye variables with periods of 5.4 days and 2.9 days, respectively.

Five open or galactic clusters are noted: the Pleiades or Seven Sisters, and the Hyades, both in Taurus; the Double Cluster in Perseus; M44, the Beehive or Praesepe, in Cancer; and the Coma Cluster, a loose group of naked-eye stars.

M42 is the famous Orion Nebula, a gas cloud out of which stars are forming. M31 is the Andromeda Galaxy, a collection of 300 billion stars located 2 million light years from Earth.