

# Watch meteors this fall

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CONTRIBUTOR

This fall, astronomers predict that the annual Leonids might display a light show so dramatic it hasn't been seen since 1999 and 2001. In recent years, the Leonids have put on a rather "boring" show but astronomers believe that 2009 will be different with about 500 meteors streaking across the sky every hour. With that many meteors (a.k.a. shooting or falling stars), the chances of seeing a fireball are good. The Leonids are basically debris left behind by the comet 55P/Tempel-Tuttle. The reason why astronomers think that we'll be getting many meteors in 2009 is because earth will be passing close to the center of the comet's debris trail laid down in 1466. "On Nov. 17, 2009, we expect the Leonids to produce upwards of 500 meteors per hour," notes Bill Cooke of the NASA Marshall Space Flight Center. "That's a very strong display." A reclining chair will help prevent that nasty stiffed-neck as well!

## Sky watch for the next month

Hunter's Moon — for those who remember last month was the "Harvest Moon" and this month the Hunter's Moon is the first full one after that. Similarly the bright, reddish light of this moon was used for hunting migrating birds and animals for winter foods. On Nov. 3 just after 6 p.m. in the northeast sky is the best time to view.

Venus and Saturn will be both visible in the southeast-east morning twilight and Saturn will be high enough if you want to look at it through the scope. If you have a clear view, you should be able to catch Saturn's moon Titan to the left.

Leonids Meteor Shower, as explained earlier, is one of the better meteor showers to observe, producing an average of 40 meteors per hour at its peak. The shower peaks this year on Nov. 17-18, but you can usually see some meteors from Nov. 13-20. The moon will be totally out of the way this year, providing an exceptional viewing experience for the Leonids. Look for the shower radiating from the constellation Leo after midnight. There actually is another meteor shower

just before this one called the Northern Taurids, which peaks on Nov. 12.

Pleiades or Seven Sisters (M45) Constellation — This favourite winter star cluster rises at night, falls in the northeast sky (sometimes next to the moon) and spans the atmosphere throughout the whole evening, usually setting with dawn at the opposite end. It is one of the most well known, ancient star collections given it is mentioned several times in Job (9:9, 38:31) and even referred to by the Jewish prophet Amos (5:8). It is easily viewable with the naked eye but even more impressive under the scope!

Also, check out [www.whatsuptonight.net](http://www.whatsuptonight.net), [www.astronomy.com](http://www.astronomy.com), [www.space.com](http://www.space.com) and [www.nasa.gov](http://www.nasa.gov). They have more detailed information and great stuff for kids all for free!

## Public events

There will be a telescope buyer's course at the Telus World of Science, 701 - 11 Street S.W. in Calgary on Nov. 18 from 7:30-10 p.m. There's a \$20 admission fee. Lead by astronomer expert Alan Dyer, this is a 2.5-hour course for prospective buyers of a new telescope. A must for all those inspired by Year of Astronomy events and who now would like to buy their own telescope, check out <http://astronomy-calgary.com/events/info/170> or call Cassandra McAuley at 403-268-8328 for details.

Moonlight Madness Gazing- Come and join us outside the Trek Center after dinner Friday, November 27, 2009, from about 7-9 pm weather pending. The waxing moon is over 10 days old and should be a good view!

Keep reaching for the sky!

*Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada — the country's leading astronomy club. It was founded in 1849, and now has more than 4,000 members and 29 centres across Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments, and can be reached at 403-485-2683 or [Neel\\_Roberts@ptccanada.com](mailto:Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com). The members meet once a month in various places in southern Alberta, and you can check them out at [www.calgary.rasc.ca/](http://www.calgary.rasc.ca/)*