

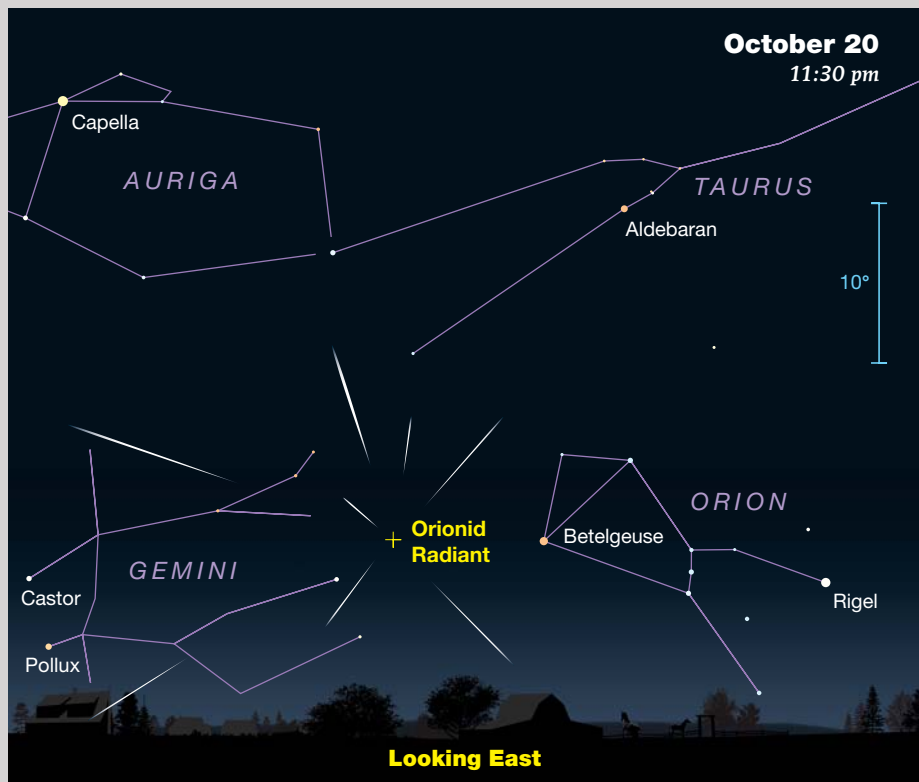
Orionids Peak on October 20/21

HALLEY'S COMET IS BACK! Well, not the *whole* comet — just little pieces of it. Earth intersects the orbital path of Mr. Halley's famous comet twice a year: first in early May, producing the Eta Aquariid meteor shower, and once again in autumn, when our planet crosses the comet's outbound leg, giving us the late-October Orionid display.

Each time, the planet plows through dust and cookie-crumb-sized debris boiled off the comet during its multiple trips to the inner solar system. Striking Earth's atmosphere at around 66 kilometers per second (148,000 mph), these fragments fling into meteors.

This year, the Orionids peak during the early morning hours of Wednesday, October 21st, when up to 15 meteors per hour will streak across the heavens, seemingly originating from Orion's upraised club (see the chart below). The peak is forecasted to occur around 6 UT (2 a.m. EDT). Thankfully, not a photon of moonlight will spoil this year's display, which begins around midnight local daylight-saving time and lasts until dawn, when the radiant climbs to the meridian.

Find a spot away from the neighbor's yard lights and relax on a reclining chair under a warm blanket while facing south or east. If you're patient, Halley's dust will make your night sparkle.



▲ The radiant for the Orionid meteor shower clears the east-northeast horizon at roughly 10:30 p.m. local daylight-saving time and reaches the meridian at 5:30 a.m., just before the start of morning twilight at mid-northern latitudes.