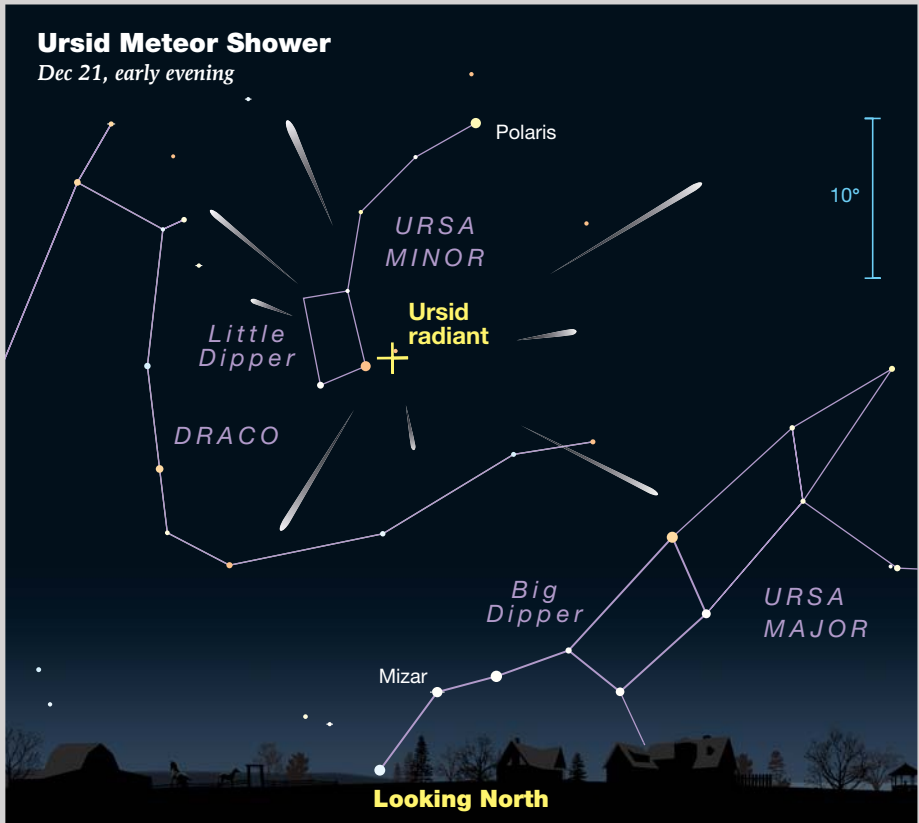


Courtesy of Sky & Telescope

The Ursids

December's “Other” Meteor Shower



▲ The Ursid radiant is visible all night from most locations north of the equator. You can view the shower beginning in the early evening of December 21st, but the display peaks in the predawn hours of the 22nd.

The Geminids rightly steal the headlines when it comes to annual meteor showers, but the lesser known **Ursids** are also worth a look. This shower originates from particles released by Comet 8P/Tuttle in its 13-year orbit around the Sun. Like the Geminids, Ursid meteoroids move relatively slowly, striking the atmosphere at a speed of 33 kilometers per second.

The Ursids are active from December 17–26, and this year they peak in the predawn hours of December 22nd (at around 4 a.m. EST) when 5 to 10

meteors per hour shoot from just near 2nd-magnitude Kochab, the brightest star in the bowl of the Little Dipper. The Moon will be at first-quarter phase and sets around midnight, leaving a dark sky during the shower's peak for observers across North America.

I like to think of the Ursid shower as a little bear briefly emerging from hibernation at the winter solstice and flinging a few meteoroids our way. Playful fella. Follow his lead and leave your warm bed for an hour or so to see what he kicks up.