

The Moon & 3 Bright Planets Align at Dawn

- a May 2022 Sky Event from the [Astronomy Club of Asheville](#)



Illustration courtesy of [SKY & TELESCOPE](#)

On May 25th - 27th, the eastern dawn skies will light up with reflected sunlight, beaming off a waning crescent Moon and three bright planets – one distant gas-giant orb, Jupiter, that will join two nearer and much smaller rocky worlds, Venus and Mars. This wonderful juxtaposition occurs along the “ecliptic” – the orbital plane of our solar system.

The ecliptic is the route that the Sun, the Moon, and the planets appear to follow across the sky, and that pathway is very evident during this wonderful dawn alignment.

Venus, the most reflective of all the planets, will be the brightest of the three, followed by Jupiter, and Mars. It is difficult to discern a third dimension while observing the sky from our 2-dimensional viewpoint, especially when some planets shine brighter than others. But try it, using the approximate distance values for the Moon and the three planets -- that are shown below for the dates around May 26th.

Planet/Moon	Approx. Distance in millions of miles
Moon	0.25
Venus	110
Mars	139
Jupiter	498

By comparison, the Sun is 93 million miles away from Earth – a distance astronomers call an “astronomical unit” or AU. Direct sunlight takes about 8 minutes and 20 seconds to reach your eyes! So, the reflected sunlight from Venus reaches your eyes in about 10 minutes, while the reflected sunlight from Jupiter left it some 45 minutes ago! Ponder that light travels at the phenomenal speed of 186,000 miles per second! ***