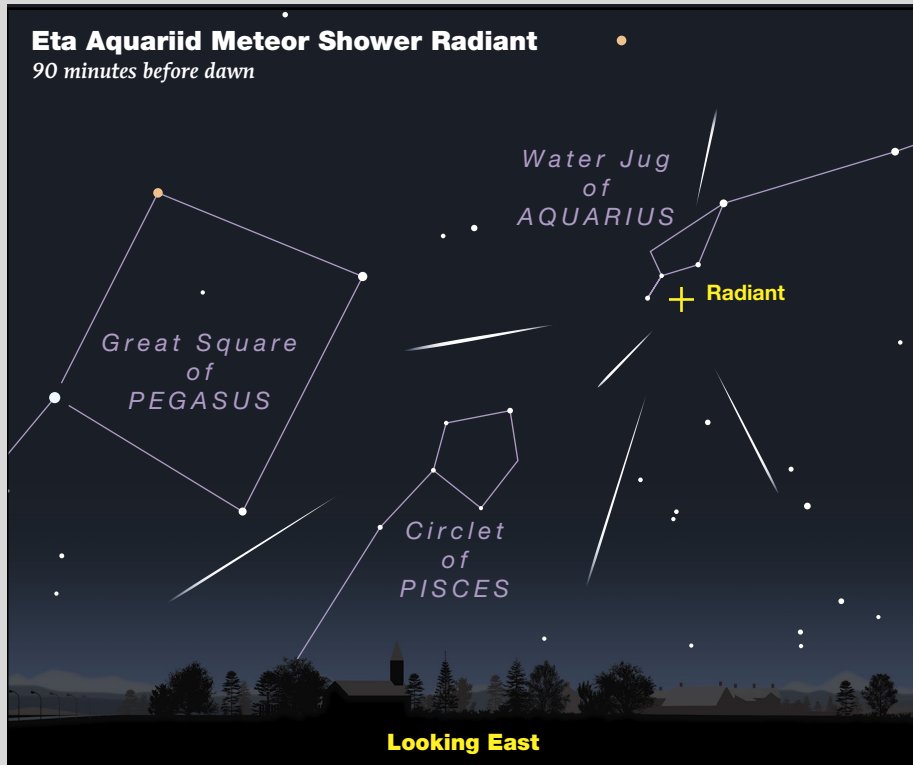


Eta Aquariids Battle Moonlight

Article courtesy of SKY & TELESCOPE

IF YOU LIKE SQUEEZING the juice out of life, I've got a meteor shower for you. The annual Eta Aquariid shower will generate some 50 fast-moving meteors per hour at its peak for tropical latitude observers one or two hours before dawn on the morning of May 6th. Due to the low altitude of the radiant, observers at mid-northern latitudes might ordinarily see 10 to 30 meteors per hour under moonless, rural skies. Unfortunately, this year the 81% waning gibbous Moon in Sagittarius will reduce that to fewer than 10. On the positive side, shower members often leave bright and persistent ionization trails called *trains*.

These particles stream from a radiant in northern Aquarius near the star Eta (η) Aquarii, which reaches 15° to 20° altitude at the start of morning twilight. Why not observe what you can of the shower, then catch Saturn in the southeastern sky in mid-twilight and finish the morning with a refreshing sunrise? Make a night of it, and you'll be less likely to be disappointed if the shower bombs.



▲ The Eta Aquariids peak in moonlight on the morning of May 6th, but they'll be active for about a week around that date. The swift flashes originate from dust shed by Halley's Comet. Observers have an hour or two of good viewing before the start of dawn twilight.