

Mid-March through late April, low in the west to southwest around 9 p.m.

Find out more at StarDate Online...
 You can hear StarDate on the radio,
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 Below are just a few StarDate
 programs related to the seasonal
 highlights:

Orion Rising December 6, 2002

Hyades September 15, 2003

Sirius A and B January 9, 2004

Orion Nebula

Just below the three stars of Orion's Belt, along his sword, is a hazy smudge that looks like a dim ember. This is the Orion Nebula, about 1,500 light-years away. Astronomers have explored this nebula with Hubble Space Telescope, Chandra X-ray Observatory, and telescopes on the ground to discover strong evidence of newly forming stars, some still wrapped up inside their dust-cloud "cocoon."

Hyades Cluster

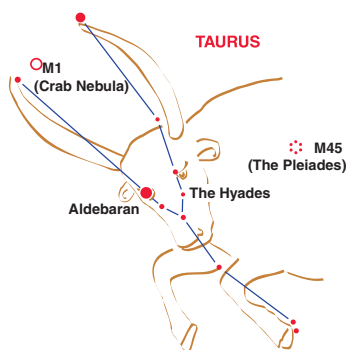
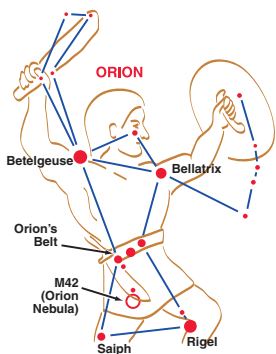
The face of Taurus, the bull, is freckled with stars of a nearby cluster, the Hyades, 150 light-years away. Taurus' bright red eye, Aldebaran, is not a member of the cluster. The distance to this cluster is well known, so astronomers calculate the distance to farther objects based on the Hyades. The stars in this family are all about the same age, having formed out of the same birth cloud of gas and dust 500 million to one billion years ago.

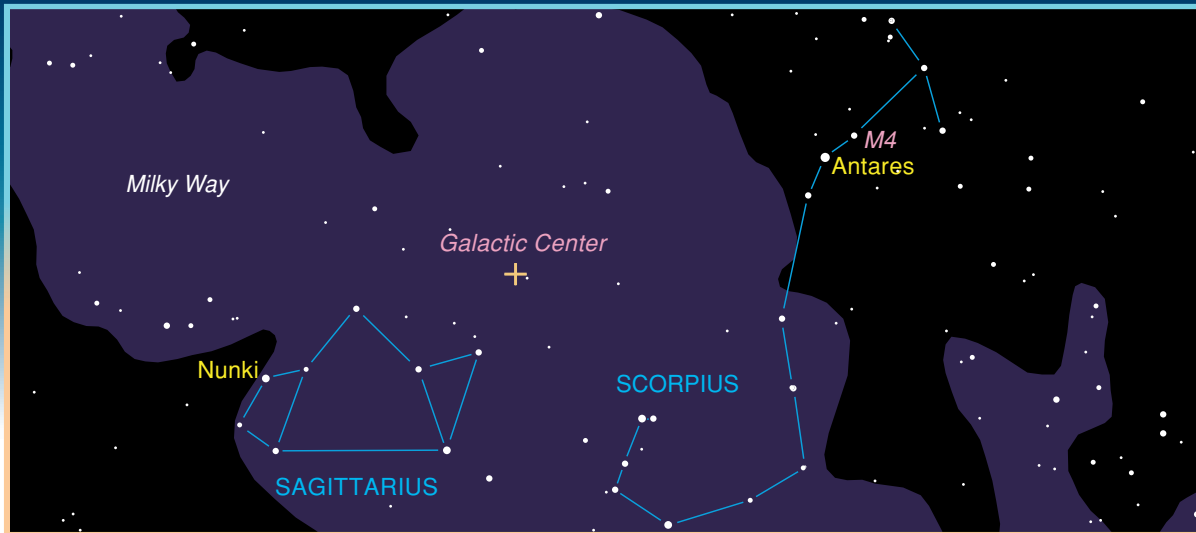
Sirius

The brightest star in the sky is also a nearby neighbor, a bit less than nine light-years away. Sirius is brighter and more massive than the Sun. If you could place Sirius next to the Sun, it would appear three and a half times brighter and a little bit bigger. Sirius has a small, dim companion called Sirius B — a white dwarf. White dwarfs are quite common, but they are hard to find because they are faint. Sirius B is the mass of the Sun, but the size of Earth.

Taurus, the Bull

Taurus' bright red eye is a red-giant star named Aldebaran. Look to the right of Aldebaran on spring evenings for a tiny dipper-shaped group of stars. This is the Pleiades.





July through August, low in the southeast to south around 10 p.m.; September, in the south to southwest around 9 p.m.

Galactic Center

Shrouded behind 27,000 light-years of gas, dust, and stars is the center of the Milky Way galaxy. Look between Sagittarius and Scorpius — that is the direction of the Milky Way's center. We orbit the galaxy's center once every 230 million years. So far the Sun has made 20 laps around the galaxy. A black hole about four million times the Sun's mass lies at the center.

Antares

The bright orange star at the heart of Scorpius, the scorpion, is a distant red supergiant. It is so large that in place of the Sun it would swallow up the planets in the solar system up to Jupiter. Not only is Antares very large, it is also very bright. Even 600 light-years away, it is one of the brightest stars in our sky. It pours out 40,000 times more light than the Sun.

M4

Next to Antares in the sky is a nearby globular cluster, M4. Look at Antares through binoculars. M4 is a misty globe of faint stars off to the side of Antares. Globular clusters hold several hundred thousand stars and inhabit several parts of the galaxy. They range throughout the halo, some plunging through our galaxy's disk. Many orbit near the bulge toward the center of the Milky Way. M4 is relatively near by, only 5,600 light-years away.

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Milky Way Chaos March 4, 2003

Scorpius Rising May 29, 2004

Moon and Scorpius May 5, 2004

