



How to...

WOW!
Under dark skies, the Perseids meteor shower can produce more than 50 “shooting stars” per hour.



Watch a meteor shower

Get ready to look up and see a dazzling display in the night sky.

Meteor showers, otherwise known as “shooting stars,” are exciting celestial spectacles to witness. This month you can view the Perseids (pronounced “per-see-ids”), an annual meteor shower that is one of the best of the year. Here’s what to do.

Learn about what’s happening

The Perseids meteor shower results from Earth passing through a trail of debris left behind by a comet.

This year it’s happening now and is active through August 24. Peak visibility will be on the nights of August 12 and 13, when there will be a new Moon. That means the sky will be at its darkest, making it ideal for viewing the shower.

On those nights, you may see the Perseids shower—it may look like stars shooting through the sky, but it’s actually tiny bits of dust, ice, and rock that burn up in Earth’s atmosphere, creating bright streaks of light.

Pick your stargazing spot

You can spot the Perseids shower anytime from 10 p.m. onward in the US. However, it will be most visible in the hours before dawn. Ask a parent if you can set an alarm and get up together to watch this once-a-summer space show. Look for a viewing

location away from streetlights or any other artificial light, which will interfere with your ability to see what’s in the sky. If you’re in your backyard, turn off the lights inside your home. You can use a flashlight or headlamp to get settled in your spot, then turn it off. You and your family could pitch a tent in your yard as a viewing spot, or simply lie face up on a blanket or a lounge chair and look skyward.

Be patient

It can take at least 20 minutes for your eyes to adjust to the dark, but then you’ll start to notice twinkling stars and other activity in your peripheral vision (what you see out of the sides of your eyes). If it’s a clear sky, you may spot the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, and Polaris (also known as the North Star). You can also use a free app like Sky Guide or Sky Map to help locate them and other starry sights.

Enjoy the action

Perseid meteors move fast—up to 37 miles per second. The shower is known for producing vivid green fireballs caused by large chunks of debris colliding with Earth’s atmosphere. Sit back, gaze into the sky, and take in the amazing show!



Set your clock for the show!

A hero among stars



Each meteor shower has what is called a radiant, the point where the meteors appear to come from. The Perseids meteor shower is named after the constellation Perseus—a mythical Greek god—because its radiant is located within this particular constellation.

According to Greek legend, Perseus discovered a beautiful princess named Andromeda who was about to be eaten by a sea monster. Perseus saved her and became a hero.

The Greek astronomer Ptolemy officially recorded the Perseus constellation in the 2nd century, and it remains one of 88 modern constellations that are recognized by the science community today.