

August Skies: Meteors, Moon Shadow, and the Milky Way Over Yerington

August may be one of the finest months of the entire year for simply stepping outside after dark and looking up. The warm evenings are comfortable, the Milky Way stretches boldly across a truly dark sky, and this year one of our best annual meteor showers arrives under almost perfect conditions. Then, toward the end of the month, the Moon itself provides another show as it passes deeply into Earth's shadow.

For those around Yerington who have never seen the Milky Way with the naked eye, August is an especially good month to try. From a dark location away from streetlights, look for a broad, pale, slightly uneven band stretching across the sky. It will not look like the brilliant photographs we see in magazines. To our unaided eyes it is softer—almost like a luminous cloud that does not move. Yet that faint glow is the combined light of innumerable distant stars in the disk of our own galaxy.¹

A useful guide is the Summer Triangle, formed by the bright stars Vega, Deneb, and Altair. During August evenings the triangle is prominent high in the sky. Deneb also marks part of the constellation Cygnus, the Swan, whose stars form the easily recognized Northern Cross. Under a dark sky, the Milky Way runs directly through this region. Find the

¹EarthSky, “The Northern Cross: Find the backbone of the Milky Way,” explaining that on late July and August evenings the Milky Way can be seen with the unaided eye under dark skies as a luminous river passing through the Northern Cross and Summer Triangle.

Summer Triangle and the Northern Cross, and you have found one of the best places to begin looking for our galaxy.

The Moon could hardly cooperate better with August's biggest meteor event. The New Moon occurs on August 12 at 10:36 a.m. Pacific time, leaving the nights of August 12 and 13 virtually free of moonlight. That is almost exactly when the Perseid meteor shower reaches its peak.²

The Perseids are among the most dependable and beloved meteor showers of the year. Earth passes each summer through debris left behind by Comet 109P/Swift-Tuttle, and tiny particles strike our atmosphere at tremendous speed, producing the flashes we call shooting stars. The predicted 2026 peak occurs on August 13, and the mornings of August 12 and 13 should be particularly rewarding. Under an exceptionally dark sky, observers may sometimes report 90 or more meteors per hour near maximum, although the number any one person actually sees will depend upon darkness, horizon, weather, and patience.³

² Time and Date, "Moonrise, Moonset, and Moon Phase in Reno, August 2026," listing Third Quarter on August 5, New Moon on August 12 at 10:36 a.m., First Quarter on August 19, and Full Moon on August 27 at 9:18 p.m.

³ EarthSky, "Perseid meteor shower 2026: All you need to know," giving the predicted August 13 peak, favorable New Moon conditions, observing times, and potential meteor rates under ideal dark skies.

There is no need for a telescope. In fact, one would only get in the way. Find a dark place with a wide view of the sky, lie back in a reclining chair or on a blanket, and look generally upward. The Perseid radiant is in the direction of Perseus, but the meteors can appear almost anywhere overhead. The hours after midnight through the beginning of dawn are generally best.

August also offers an easy planetary beacon. Venus shines brilliantly in the western sky after sunset and reaches its greatest eastern elongation—its greatest apparent distance from the Sun in our evening sky—on August 14–15. Venus is extraordinarily bright and requires no telescope or binoculars. If you see a brilliant, steady-looking point in the western twilight and wonder whether it might be an airplane, watch it for a few moments. The airplane will move. Venus will remain patiently where it belongs.⁴

The month begins with a waning Moon. Third Quarter occurs August 5, followed by the wonderfully dark New Moon on August 12. First Quarter comes August 19, and the Full Moon arrives August 27 at 9:18 p.m. Pacific time.

But that Full Moon brings something special.

On the evening of Thursday, August 27, Nevada will experience a partial lunar eclipse. As the Moon rises in the east-southeast, it will already be entering Earth's darker central shadow. For the Reno-Yerington region,

⁴ EarthSky, "Venus greatest distance from the sun August 14–15, 2026," describing Venus in the western evening sky and its greatest eastern elongation on August 15.

the partial phase begins at approximately 7:33 p.m., shortly after moonrise. Maximum eclipse occurs around 9:12 p.m., when most of the Moon will be immersed in Earth's shadow. The partial phase ends about 10:51 p.m., with the final faint penumbral shading disappearing around midnight.⁵

Unlike a solar eclipse, a lunar eclipse is completely safe to watch with the naked eye. No glasses or filters are necessary. Binoculars may make the changing colors and shadow boundary more obvious, but they are not required. Because the Moon will be very low when the partial eclipse begins, find a location with an unobstructed eastern or east-southeastern horizon.

For Milky Way watchers, the best nights come earlier in the month, particularly around the New Moon. Give your eyes at least 15 to 20 minutes away from bright lights and phone screens. Look overhead and toward the south, find the Summer Triangle, and then look for the pale river of stars flowing through it. From our Northern Hemisphere viewpoint, August is among the best times of year for seeing the Milky Way stretched prominently across the evening sky.

August skies over Yerington seem determined to remind us that sometimes the finest entertainment does not require a ticket. We have a dark-sky Perseid shower, brilliant Venus in the western evening, the

⁵ Time and Date, "August 28, 2026 Partial Lunar Eclipse in Reno, Nevada, USA," giving the local eclipse circumstances, including moonrise, beginning of the visible partial phase, maximum eclipse at 9:12 p.m., and the end of the eclipse.

Milky Way overhead, and finally the rising Full Moon slipping into Earth's shadow. All we really need to do is find a dark place, pull up a chair, and remember to look up.