



I actually began my summer stargazing on June 21st with a spectacular view of Mars, shining golden in the night sky. Right now Mars is the closest it has been to the Earth since 1988, even though it's still 42 million miles away! Just think, last year at this time Mars was 244 million miles away from Earth.

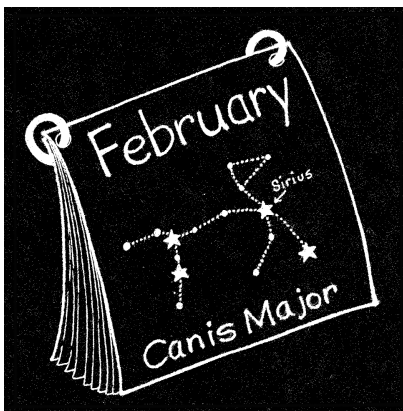
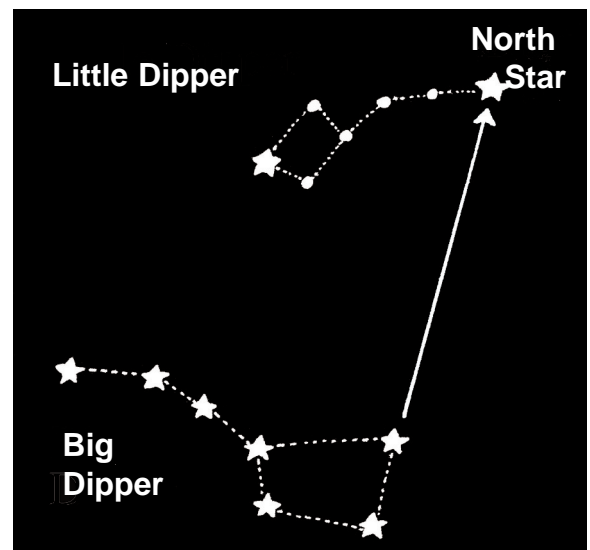
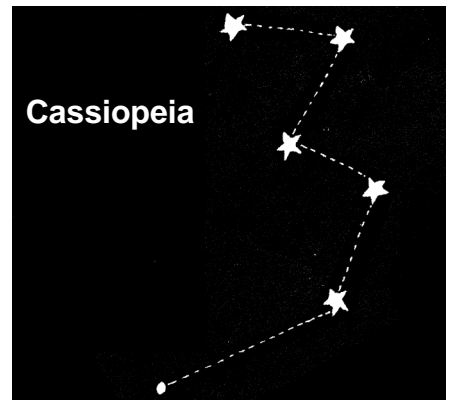
The best time to see the most stars is on a moonless night after 9 pm.

Three of my favorite constellations are: The Big Dipper, The Little Dipper and Cassiopeia. They are very near each other in the summer night sky.

Here is how to find them.

Locate the two stars at the outside edge of the Big Dipper. "Draw" an imaginary line to the brightest star in the Little Dipper. Congratulations! You just located the North Star! Now, keep going past the North Star and you'll run into the constellation Cassiopeia.

Think of the North Star as the center of a huge circle. The North Star is "FIXED" but the other stars appear to rotate around the North Star all summer long.



Have you ever heard the term "the dog days of summer?" The months of July and August can be very hot and muggy. During July and August we can't see the dog constellation, Canis Major, because it rises during the day, with the sun. Long ago people said the dog star, Sirius added its heat to the Sun's and made the hot, muggy days of summer which they called the "dog days."

If you want to see Canis Major and the dog star, Sirius, you'll have to wait until winter. Sirius is especially bright in February.