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Title:

Night Sky Notes

Abstract:

A new Internet offering from the Abrams Planetarium, "Night Sky Notes" is a text based daily description of what's up in the night sky. Using RSS Feed format, this can be easily incorporated into your planetarium's web page.

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Have you ever wanted to put current skywatching information on your web page but realized you don't have the time to change it every day or didn't know how to easily keep the page up to date? If so, this might be an answer for you. It's called "Abrams Planetarium Night Sky Notes". It's a daily astronomical tidbit of information that you can incorporate into your planetarium's web page. I update it so you don't have to. Best of all, it's free.

It's done using RSS and Java. RSS is a relatively new thing on the Internet. It stands for Really Simple Syndication. RSS feeds are now common for many news web sites. Using software called a feed reader, users can subscribe to news feeds and read news from several different sources without having to visit different web sites. In this case, I'm using software called Feed2JS that takes the RSS feed I write and converts it to the Java Script that in on your web page.

It works like this. You visit our "Night Sky Notes build page" and input some information about how you would like to format your web page. It generates a few lines of HTML code which you then cut and paste onto your web page HTML code. Then, as I write more Night Sky Note entries, it automatically shows up on your page. It couldn't be easier. You don't have to know anything about the RSS format or how to write Java scripts, it's all done for you. You just need to cut and paste once.

Here's an example of a few days of the "Night Sky Notes":

Night Sky Note for October 15, 2007

Monday, October 15, 2007 The waxing crescent Moon is below Jupiter and to the left of Antares.

Night Sky Note for October 14, 2007

Sunday, October 14, 2007 Venus passes 2.9° south of Saturn. This is the last meeting of their triple conjunction. A triple conjunction happens when a planet passes another object three times. The first was on June 30th, 2007 and the second pass was in August but was lost in the glow of the Sun. Planets normally move west to east across the background stars. At times, planets move retrograde, or east to west. Venus has been passing Saturn and in the process did a retrograde loop causing the triple conjunction.

Night Sky Note for October 13, 2007

Saturday, October 13, 2007 Venus and Saturn are 3° apart and both are 5° from Regulus. Look in the east an hour before sunrise.

Night Sky Note for October 12, 2007

Friday, October 12, 2007 A very young Moon is close to Mercury but it can't be seen by most of the USA. Only Hawaii and parts of the far south and southwest will be able to see it. Look 20 minutes after sunset in the WSW. Binoculars will be needed.

Visit the Abrams Planetarium web site www.pa.msu.edu/abrams and follow the links to Night Sky Notes. Once there you will see the link to the information on how to put Abrams Planetarium's Night Sky Notes on your web page. It's very straightforward.

Night Sky Notes evolved from our Skywatchers Diary. For many years our "Skywatchers Diary" was part of our web offerings, a monthly day to day look at the night sky written by Dave Batch and Bob Victor. By 2007 they no longer had the time to continue writing it every month. I offered to take it over but changed the format from a page that was updated once a month to something that was updated more often. I try to keep about a week ahead of the current day, adding a few days at a time. I find much of the content for the notes from our Sky Calendar written by Bob Victor.

So if you'd like to include the Night Sky Notes on your web site or just like to read it. It's there for you. Please drop me a line if you are using it and find it useful. Contact me at frenchj@msu.edu.

In addition to the Night Sky Notes. Abrams Planetarium is also doing a monthly podcast. Using RSS, people can subscribe to the Starline Podcast too. But that's a topic for another paper.