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WHAT THE HECK IS NATIONAL METEOR WATCH DAY?

BY LISA MILDON ([HTTP://COFFEEHOUSEWRITERS.COM/AUTHOR/LISA-MILDON/](http://COFFEEHOUSEWRITERS.COM/AUTHOR/LISA-MILDON/)) / JUNE 25, 2018 / 162 / 0

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What the heck is National Meteor Watch Day?

Seems like there is a holiday or some kind of observance for nearly any topic out there. If one wanted to, you could probably hold some celebration every day for some special day or other. (Or use it as an excuse to imbibe a few adult drinks.) You might be asking, *What is National Meteor Watch Day?* It is precisely as the title says, a special day set aside to watch for meteors in the summer skies. But surely there is more to it.

So, how did this observance begin? It is believed to have started in Greece when the Greek astronomer Ptolemy wrote about how the Gods would look down on us mere mortals on Earth. When doing this, Ptolemy hypothesized that some of the stars would slip through the cracks, thus becoming “shooting stars” or meteors. Because of this occurrence, the Gods would be more receptive to any prayers or wishes as they were closer to Earth. Thus, began the watch for meteors. It is unknown why June 30th was specified as National Meteor Watch Day, other than perhaps this is when the meteor showers are at their peak.

Perhaps you’re wondering what the difference between a meteor and a shooting star. Meteors are often called shooting or falling stars. If an actual part of the meteor actually lands on our planet, then it would be called a meteorite. Of course, meteors give off different colors as they streak across our sky. What causes these different colors are the physical makeup of the meteor. Below is a simple list of colors and what chemical compound causes them:

Red - Silicate

Orange or Yellow - Sodium

Yellow	-	Iron
Purple	-	Potassium
Blue or Green	-	Copper



Most of these meteors are as small as a grain of sand, which explains why we don't find many of them on our planet. They merely burn up before reaching the surface below. However, there are a few meteors that can handle our atmosphere and not entirely burn up. Typically, these have some iron in the composition as iron can withstand the stress our atmosphere puts the meteors through.

Now that you know a bit more about meteors and its special observance day, here are some tips for best viewing:

Avoid the full moon.

The moon is definitely a spectacular celestial body to watch on any given night, but the bright light of a full moon will significantly diminish the beauty of a meteor shower. Try viewing the show when the moon is a mere sliver.

Avoid the city.

Just like with the moon, city lights cause a great deal of light pollution. Just go outside in the evening. You can see the glow of lights from the city around you. This will definitely hamper the quality viewing a darker, rural sky can offer.

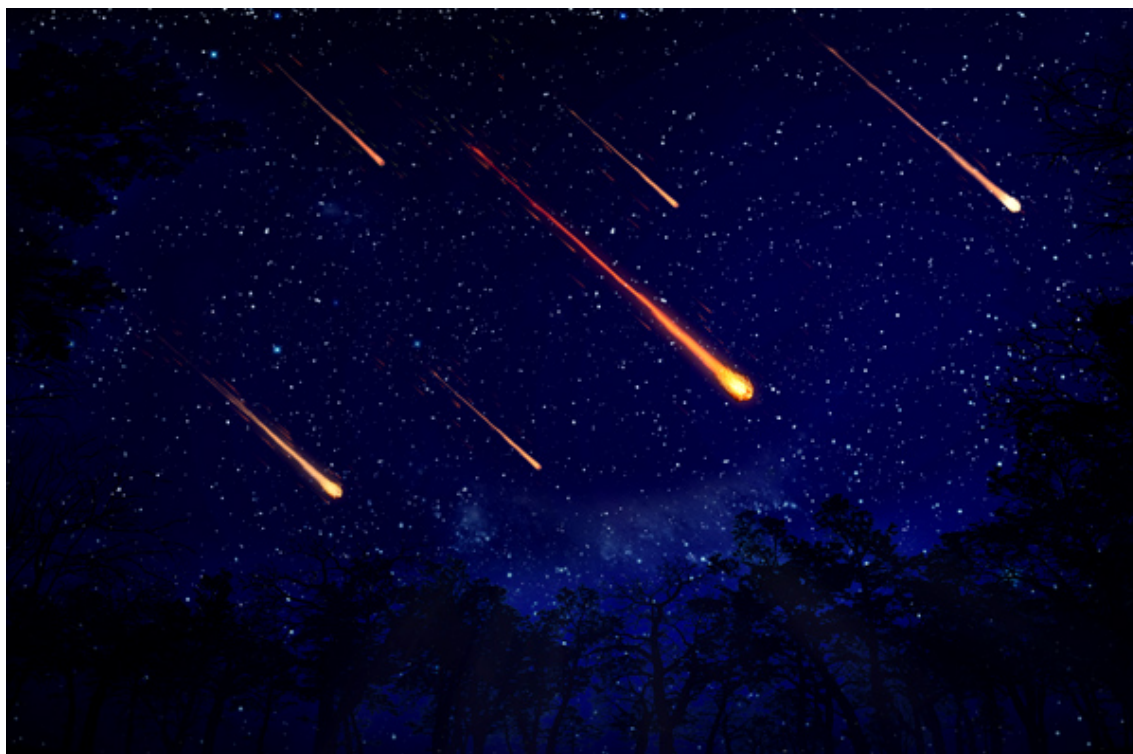
Avoid a cloudy night.

Of course, clouds can dull the light from the moon, but it will also dim the spectacular shooting star spectacle. Clear skies are truly the optimal way to see Mother Nature's fireworks.

Best viewing times.

Summer always seems best as the likelihood of clouds is much less than other seasons. The time of day can also determine just how fantastic your view will be. Pre-dawn hours are best for a dramatic view. This is because the part of the Earth you are standing on is facing the direction of the planet's orbit.

Following these tips should give you the best seat in the house to view the light show in the night's sky. So, grab those binoculars, telescopes, or even just a blanket to lie down on and peer up at the majesty. Just don't miss this epic splendor.



(<https://www.nps.gov/cuga/learn/news/shootingstar.htm>)

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