

Acadiana Sky

How to Use the Night Sky Checklists

The Night Sky Checklists were originally developed for the Lafayette Science Museum, Lafayette, LA

The Night Sky Checklists are designed for use with the unaided eye, but many of the objects are interesting in binoculars or telescopes too. Observers using telescopes should be aware of their telescope's practical limitations regarding field of view, magnification, resolution, and light gathering power.

Very little equipment is needed to enjoy using the checklists. Aside from a clear night sky, observers will really *need* only the lists and a pencil for checking objects off as they are found. Each object listed has a box to check and a box for any comments you might want to record (date, sky quality, impressions, friends with you, etc.), and each checklist has a Guide giving a brief explanation of each object on that list. If you are not familiar with constellations, use the Acadiana Sky star maps on this web site.

Observers around city lights will have difficulty finding all but the brightest objects on the lists because of energy-wasting light pollution. For the best use, turn out your own lights and try to avoid other people's lights. If safe and practical, get into shadows or (best of all) get out of town. Plan to spend several minutes outside letting your eyes adapt to the darkness. Once that happens, it is best to light the checklists using a fairly dim flashlight giving off a deep red light, as that will preserve your night vision. A chair is handy, as is bug spray. It's not a bad idea to check the place where you observe for fire ants or other varmints.

There is a Night Sky Checklist for objects that can be seen year-round, as well as checklists for different months. Not everything can be seen in one night, even on the year-round checklist. In particular, planets can be seen in different months in different years. The seasonal checklists assume the time is approximately 9:30 p.m., whether standard time or daylight time. Many objects can be seen in more than one group of months, and are placed on the checklist for the period when they are best seen around 9:30.

The checklists look best when printed on letter-sized paper.