

Yes, my dear – there is a Valentine Star!

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Contributor

Have you ever wondered if there was a celestial object named after the saintly love day? The fact of the matter is a resounding yes — there is a Valentine Star and it is more commonly known as Betelgeuse (pronounced beetle juice), a favourite of many astronomers. So why is it the Valentine's Day Star? A telescope will reveal its red colour beats slowly like a giant heart and stimulates the spirit of those attuned to it. The prominent object we can see every Feb. 14 is this bright scarlet star because it's at its highest point above the horizon every Valentine's Day night between the hours of 8 and 9 p.m. It marks the shoulder star of Orion, and changes its size regularly like a slow pulsating inferno that thumps once every six years. When Betelgeuse is fully contracted at its smallest size, it is a whopping 500 times the width of our

Sun but when it expands to its largest size, it's almost 900 times as broad.

Betelgeuse is an extremely large red super giant star, fluctuating in approximate size from the equivalent of Mars' orbit, to that of Jupiter's, so it's monstrous compared to our puny yellow Sun. It is the second brightest star in the constellation Orion and the ninth brightest object in the night sky. It is a vertex of the Winter Triangle and centre of the Winter Hexagon.

It's possible that Betelgeuse will become a supernova, which will be the brightest ever recorded, outshining the Moon in the night sky. Considering its size and age, it may explode within the next thousand years.

Since its rotational axis is not toward the Earth and also because of its 640 light year distance, Betelgeuse's supernova will not cause a gamma ray burst in the direction of Earth large enough to damage its ecosystems. Therefore, this February after you get the

chocolates and flowers, surprise your special someone with first a picture of the massive red star, pounding like a nucleus full of cosmic love and then show them the Valentine's Day Star that evening. Believe me they'll remember it the right way!

Sky watch for the next month:

— Our moon will follow Saturn this Monday all night rising in the east and setting by morning in the west.

— The red planet will tag along the Beehive Cluster, or the Messier Object 44 (M44), starting at sunset in the northeast-east Feb. 7 until dawn setting in the northwest.

— Pleiades, also known as the the Seven Sisters (M45) will follow the Moon Feb. 21 from about top dead center in the evening and setting about 3 a.m. in the northwest.

— The Valentine's Day star, Betelgeuse, is visible Feb. 14, starting in the southeast sky after sundown and setting in the west at about 4 a.m.