

Perseids Meteor Shower exhibition

It may not be Labour Day yet, but one of the surest signs that the summer is petering out is the annual August Perseids Meteor Shower. Break out the lawn chairs any time after Thursday, Aug. 9 after sun set for the annual Perseids Meteor shower, which peaks by the next day for the weekend and runs until Tuesday, Aug. 14. The celestial show has been observed for about thousands of years 2,000 years with the earliest information coming from the oriental Far East. Some Roman Catholics refer to the Perseids as the "tears of St. Lawrence," since Aug. 10 is the date of that his martyrdom. In 2009, the estimated peak zenithal hourly rate was a phenomenal 173, but fainter meteors were washed out by a waning gibbous moon.

This year the Moon is not there, so if the weather co-operates, it will be all right with an estimated 60-plus meteors expected each hour. We can expect a repeat for 2013, but don't wait until then. The cosmic event is the



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The Sky's the Limit

result of comet 109P/Swift-Tuttle trailing debris that has been seen since BC and was last observed in 1992. But it's not scheduled to return until 2126, so don't hold your breath. The Perseids is such a bonus, not only because it happens in the summer, but also because it requires no equipment like telescopes or astronomical apparatus to see. Just look up and enjoy the display with some warm beverages, friends and food.

Sky watch for the next month

A daylight Venus occultation by the moon will occur on Monday, Aug. 13 just after 2 p.m. Use certified astronomy viewing solar filters to avoid blindness (as this is the hazard associated with this event) Venus

will duck behind the sun for more than an hour before coming back on the other side.

Check out a medley of planets, stars and the moon on Tuesday, Aug. 21. Just before 10 p.m. in the southwest-west after sunset, you'll catch the waxing moon, Mars, Saturn and Spica in the same general direction for the night by 10:45 p.m.

Don't miss the Milky Way's brilliance. This is an excellent month to view our home galaxy without freezing. The best time is after 11 p.m. until dawn.

The annual Perseids Meteor Shower's peak starts Friday, Aug. 10 and continues until Sunday, Aug. 12 with an estimated rate of about 60-plus meteors per hour. The best time to view the meteor shower is starting at 11 p.m. facing the northeast in the constellation of Perseus (the website www.skymaps.com has free star charts that will help you find it) until dawn. For further information, check out www.chiff.com/science/

perseids.htm, which has a complete video guide.

Public events for the next month

Come sleep under a starry night at the Vulcan Tourism and Trek Station.

This year, the Trek Station will launch an annual camp out under the Perseids Meteor shower. Bring your own bedding Friday, Aug. 10 after supper time. Gazing to start late at night with astrophotography — weather permitting — and treats and refreshments provided free of charge. All are welcome and for more information, contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994. Also, the website www.vulcantourism.com is updated regularly!

Happy meteor shower viewing and keep reaching for the sky!

Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments at 403-485-2683 and Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com.