

Moon Gazing

For many of us, our very first experience of learning about the celestial bodies begins when we saw our first full moon in the sky. It is truly a magnificent view even to the naked eye. If the night is clear, you can see amazing detail of the lunar surface just star gazing on in your back yard.

Naturally, as you grow in your love of astronomy, you will find many celestial bodies fascinating. But the moon may always be our first love because is the one far away space object that has the unique distinction of flying close to the earth and upon which man has walked.

Your study of the moon, like anything else, can go from the simple to the very complex. To gaze at the moon with the naked eye, making yourself familiar with the lunar map will help you pick out the seas, craters and other geographic phenomenon that others have already mapped to make your study more enjoyable. Moon maps can be had from any astronomy shop or online and they are well worth the investment.

The best time to view the moon, obviously, is at night when there are few clouds and the weather is accommodating for a long and lasting study. The first quarter yields the greatest detail of study. And don't be fooled but the blotting out of part of the moon when it is not in full moon stage. The phenomenon known as "earthshine" gives you the ability to see the darkened part of the moon with some detail as well, even if the moon is only at quarter or half display.

To kick it up a notch, a good pair of binoculars can do wonders for the detail you will see on the lunar surface. For best results, get a good wide field in the binocular settings so you can take in the lunar landscape in all its beauty. And because it is almost impossible to hold the binoculars still for the length of time you will want to gaze at this magnificent body in space, you may want to add to your equipment arsenal a good tripod that you can affix the binoculars to so you can study the moon in comfort and with a stable viewing platform.

Of course, to take your moon worship to the ultimate, stepping your equipment up to a good starter telescope will give you the most stunning detail of the lunar surface. With each of these upgrades your knowledge and the depth and scope of what you will be able to see will improve geometrically. For many amateur astronomers, we sometimes cannot get enough of what we can see on this our closest space object.

To take it to a natural next level, you may want to take advantage of partnerships with other astronomers or by visiting one of the truly great telescopes that have been set up by professionals who have invested in better techniques for eliminating atmospheric interference to see the moon even better. The internet can give you access to the Hubble and many of the huge telescopes that are pointed at the moon all the time. Further, many astronomy clubs are working on ways to combine multiple telescopes, carefully synchronized with

computers for the best view of the lunar landscape.

Becoming part of the society of devoted amateur astronomers will give you access to these organized efforts to reach new levels in our ability to study the Earth's moon. And it will give you peers and friends who share your passion for astronomy and who can share their experience and areas of expertise as you seek to find where you might look next in the huge night sky, at the moon and beyond it in your quest for knowledge about the seemingly endless universe above us.

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