

Throw a Star Party!

Tips for Offering a Nighttime Viewing Session with Telescopes

1. Pick a date at which the Moon will be high in the evening sky. Select a time when the Moon will be visible in the early evening sky using sources such as [StarDate](#), the [Planet Finder](#) applet, or other planetarium program. Try to avoid dates when the Moon is full or nearly full (see below), as its light will wash out other nighttime objects. The Moon is best viewed when it is a crescent or in first quarter, when the terrain casts longer shadows and the features become much easier to see. You may choose to observe other night sky objects as well. A brief tour of the month's constellations, deep-sky objects, planets, and events is available through [Tonight's Sky](#). (Note: Venus and Jupiter are almost always bright when visible, Mars is often bright, and Saturn and Mercury are always a bit faint. Uranus and Neptune are too faint to see without telescopes or binoculars.)
2. Identify a start and end time for your program on your intended date. Best viewing times will begin about an hour after sunset. Find sunset times and Moon phases for your area through <http://www.sunrisesunset.com/> or similar sources.
3. Optional: Contact your local astronomy club or other amateur astronomers. To contact your local astronomy club, type in your zip code at [Astronomical League](#) or search at [Sky and Telescope](#). Let them know which nighttime objects you would most like for the children to see.
4. Provide a viewing area, preferably away from bright lights and traffic. Try to avoid nearby obstructions, such as trees or buildings, which will block certain sections of the sky. Will the objects you intend to view be visible from that location in early evening?
5. Plan for access to restrooms, and if possible, to drinks. Have water available for amateur astronomers and visitors.
6. Have a back-up plan in place before the announcement for inclement weather: Will the event be cancelled, postponed, or moved inside with different activities? If the event is cancelled or postponed, at what time or point will the decision be made to do so, and how will the audience hear about it?
7. If appropriate, plan to have the viewing area sprayed for mosquitoes or treated for fire ants in advance of the observing session.
8. If possible, ask for nearby bright overhead lights and sprinkler systems to be turned off during the period of the observing session.

9. On the night of the observing session, arrange for telescopes to be set up before sunset, so that there is still sufficient light to arrange things.
10. Optional: Provide maps of the Moon. Children might enjoy identifying the Moon's features with copies of [*An Earth-based Tour of the Moon*](#) and/or [*Skywatcher's Guide to the Moon*](#).
11. Optional: Point out features on the Moon to visitors. See the [Observing the Moon](#) "Moon Map Guide" for talking points about the [Skywatcher's Guide to the Moon](#) hand-out.

Enjoy the view!



Credit: [International Observe the Moon Night](#).