

Leonid Meteor Shower: Meteor Storm!

" Most likely the last opportunity in our lifetimes to see a stupendous "storm" of Leonid meteors... The Leonid meteors at their peak are capable of producing the grandest display of celestial fireworks known to man. For about an hour or so the heavens seem to burst open and pour forth a deluge of shooting stars. The spectator stands agape, his mind numbed, his eyes dazzled, and his soul thrilled by the sight of shooting stars appearing by the hundreds... perhaps even thousands per hour."
Joe Rao

If you watched the Leonid meteor shower last year and liked it, you're in for a real treat this year! This will be the last year for the Leonids' 33 year peak and it promises to be spectacular.

At the peak, 5:23 to 5:47 am EST Nov. 19th, the eastern US could see as many as 6,000 meteors per hour. An earlier peak 10:38 to 11:04 pm EST on the 18th should produce around 2000 meteors or more per hour. The only downside is that the Moon will be in the sky, though for the main peak the moon will be low in the west. Moonlight will likely make it harder to see dimmer meteors.

The meteor shower is called the Leonids because the meteors appear to radiate from the constellation Leo. Around 11:00 pm, Leo will be just rising in the eastern sky. The later peak at 5:30 am will have Leo high in the sky, almost overhead, and in a much better position for watching meteors. The front part of the Leo constellation Leo is a distinctive backwards question mark and quite easy to spot.

You don't need binoculars or a telescope, just your eyes. Look at the area around Leo, but let your eyes relax as they will pick up motion much easier and you will see more meteors. The meteors are actually debris from comet Temple. Most of the meteors are icy rock material, quite often as small as a grain of sand. Almost all meteors burn up in Earth's atmosphere, some quite spectacularly as fireballs. Happy Meteor Gazing!

Incredible images, star maps and additional information is available at http://StarrySkies.com/The_sky/events/meteors/

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