

Our Night Sky for September 2nd, 2024

As we make our way around the night sky and spot familiar constellations and stars it might help to picture an imaginary part of the sky called the Ecliptic. The Ecliptic is the apparent path of the sun across our sky. We describe it as the path the sun takes, but of course it is the earth that is rotating on its' axis tilted at 23.5 degrees and rotating around the sun once every year. This makes the path the sun and the stars paint on our sky pretty complicated.

The ecliptic helps us describe the path of the planets beyond our orbit as well. In the summer the sun's path is higher in our sky and slowly moves daily lower until its lowest point at the winter solstice December 21st.

If you remember the path the sun took during the day, this is approximately where you will find the planets path at night. The planets are found slightly above or below the path of the ecliptic across our night sky. The outer planets are returning to our night sky after summer on the other side of the sky and only in our daytime sky. Again, we describe it as Mars or Jupiter returning but its really the earth moving much faster. Jupiter takes 12 earth years to complete one trip around the sun and Saturn almost 30 earth years. Poor Pluto hasn't even completed one orbit since it was discovered, included as our ninth planet and then demoted to non- planet. It still hasn't completed one 248-year orbit of Our Night Sky.