Planet Visibility

2025 – 2026

The following diagrams show, in graphical form, when the five "naked-eye" planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn are visible in the night sky during the period July 2025 – June 2026.

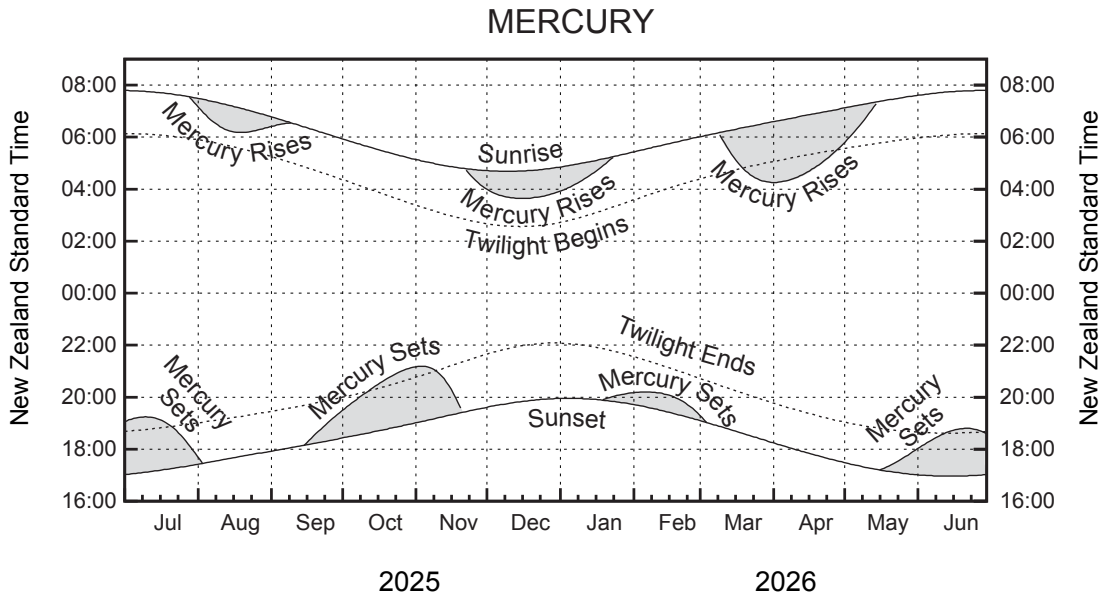
Each diagram spans the hours of darkness, covering the period from 16:00 to 08:00 with midnight being represented by the central line across the diagram. For a given date, time runs from the bottom to the top of the diagram. Times are shown in terms of New Zealand Standard Time; one hour must be added when New Zealand Daylight Time is in force. Each diagram is plotted for Wellington; time differences at other locations in New Zealand will generally not exceed an hour.

In addition to the planet information, the diagrams show the time of sunset and sunrise as well as the end and start of astronomical twilight which is the time when the Sun is 18° below the horizon. The shaded area of each diagram indicates the range of dates/times that the planet is visible in the night sky.

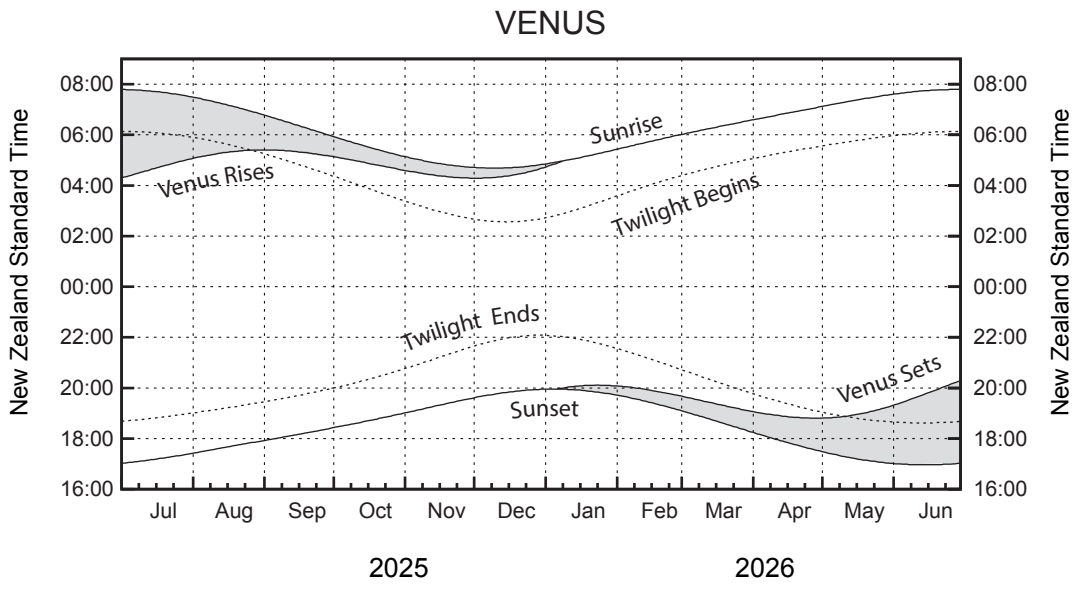
Appearance of the planets

Unless they are near to the horizon, planets can be distinguished from the twinkling stars by their more steady appearance. Twinkling is caused by turbulence in the atmosphere which has a greater effect on the light coming from point sources (stars) than on the light from much closer planets which are not point sources. Another pointer to identifying planets is that they are usually one of the brightest of the objects in the night sky.

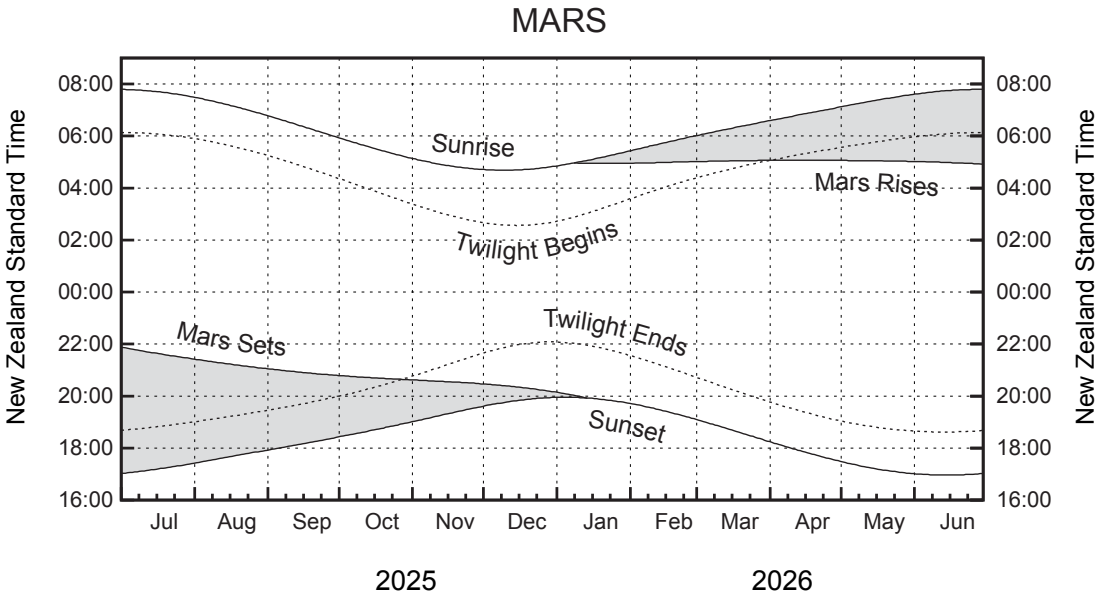
Mercury is the most difficult to see of the bright planets; due to its close proximity to the Sun it is seldom seen in fully dark skies. Venus is readily identified by its brightness – being exceeded by only the Sun and Moon. Venus is often referred to as either the Evening Star (when visible in the west after sunset) or the Morning Star (in the east before sunrise). Mars is notable for its orange-red appearance and is popularly known as the Red Planet. Jupiter's white light always outshines all of the stars whilst pale yellow Saturn is usually the least conspicuous of the five naked-eye planets.



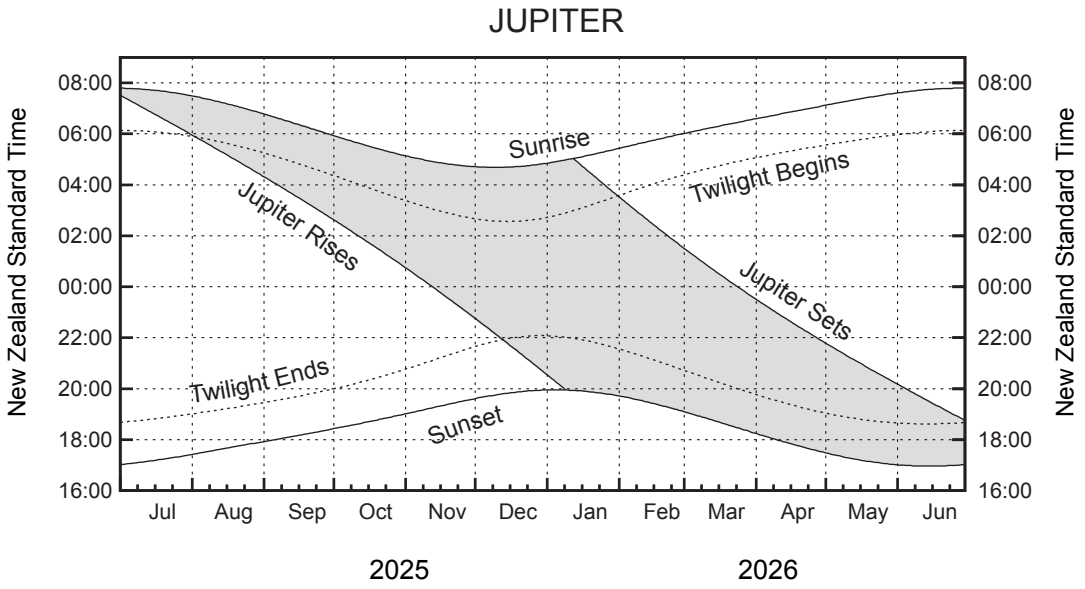
Mercury is the most difficult of the bright planets to see as it always appears near the Sun. This means it is visible only towards the horizon in the twilight sky. In the mornings it may be seen low in the pre-dawn twilight during mid-August and again mid-December, however the best morning appearance will occur during the period late March to mid-April when it rises before twilight begins. The best times to see Mercury in the evening will occur at the beginning of July and again at the end of October. A very unfavourable appearance will occur in February, whilst a slightly better chance of seeing Mercury will take place mid-June.



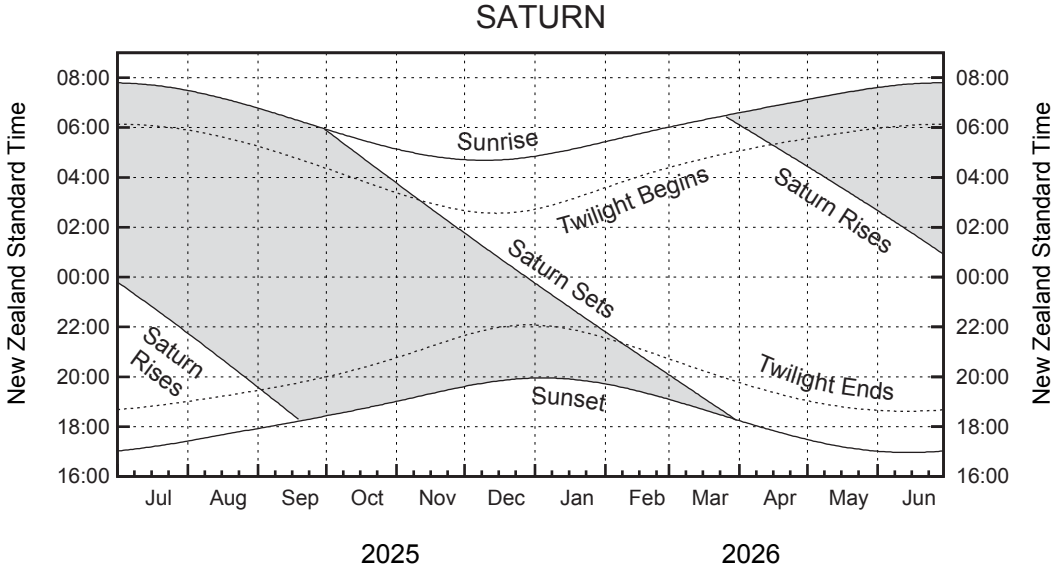
Venus will be visible as a bright object in the eastern pre-dawn sky at the beginning of July. Its visibility will gradually decrease over the coming months – at the beginning of September Venus rises as twilight begins and then closer to sunrise until the end of the year when its morning appearance comes to an end. Late in January Venus will begin to slowly become more apparent in the western sky in the evening. After mid-May Venus will set as twilight ends and at the end of June it will set more than 3 hours after sunset.



Mars sets at 10 p.m. at the start of July and remains visible in the western sky until early November when it sets an hour after sunset during twilight. The red planet then reappears in the eastern dawn sky during February – March. Mars will then begin rising earlier, however by the end of June this will be only an hour before twilight begins.



Jupiter will rise shortly before the Sun at the beginning of July, rising progressively earlier until mid-November when it rises at midnight. Two months later the planet will be visible throughout the night. The giant planet will then start setting earlier so that the planet will set as twilight begins at the end of June.



Saturn rises shortly before midnight at the beginning of July and will be visible throughout the night by late September. The ringed planet will then start setting during the early morning hours, and before midnight from the beginning of January. During February and March, Saturn will set during twilight and will become increasingly difficult to see from the beginning of March. The planet will then reappear in the eastern sky, rising during twilight in April, then progressively earlier until it rises at 1 a.m. at the end of June.