



# Sneezing's Greetings!

-Brad Young, Astronomy Club of Tulsa

What some call the best part of the observing year has passed us now. From the end of Dog Days on August 11th until November 11th, the period of late summer to Veteran's Day is a great season for astronomy outdoors. In Oklahoma, hot short nights short earlier in the summer can be an issue. But during the glory months of August, September, and October, we have cooler weather with clear blue skies, lower humidity, and plenty of star parties.



Then, sometime after Halloween, we get our real first cold front, often followed by dreary cold rain. Everybody catches a cold. We've all known winter was coming. Slowly each evening we noticed that first Spica and then Scorpius were no longer there in the dusk. At midnight, instead of the Summer Triangle still being up, only the Winter Cross of Cygnus stood in the northwest. Or you noticed the Sun getting lower and setting further south every night. The big jolt came with the change back to Standard Time. But this was just a reminder that we had been fooling ourselves for almost eight months. We humans decided we wanted time to be different and so we gave up sleep to have sunshine deeper into the night. Finally, around Halloween it is obvious we can no longer keep up the charade and have kids walking to school in the dark.



So, is late autumn the end of astronomy? Not necessarily. After we become acclimated to the cold, winter in Oklahoma can often be a great time to observe too. The long nights are sometimes clear as a bell with low humidity producing great transparency. You can start observing right

after dinner and be done and in bed by midnight after a long productive session. Think of it as changing from trout fishing to ice fishing. You need different clothing and equipment, but it can be just as enjoyable.

Astronomy during the winter can be a matter of waiting for the right night or looking into alternative methods. For instance, the sun can be a good target for solar astronomy during the winter during the warmest part of the day. Radio astronomy doesn't care what time of day it is. And when it's just too cloudy or frigid to be outside it's a great time to plan for when the next decent night does arrive so that you'll be prepared to make every moment count when they come. You can reflect on the season just passed and figure out what you enjoyed the most. Are there things you want to do more of next year or do more of right now? Is there any information you need to be prepared for what's next?



Sometimes, nothing beats a warm night under the stars where you can fall asleep in your lawn chair and wake up at dawn was just a slight chill. But there is something to be said for bundling up and going out under the winter sky with the brightest stars and some of the nicest deep sky sights you're going to see. Orion stands high in the south, with all the Fall constellations chock full of galaxies still visible in the West. The Milky Way passes from straight overhead down through Canis Major to the southern horizon. And if you do stay out late, you can see the Big Dipper rising again and Leo tempting you to look for more galaxies. This winter will feature Jupiter and Saturn in the evenings, and Mars at opposition right around the Holidays.



Astronomy doesn't have to be just a warm weather sport. You can get out and enjoy it even in the off season.

## References:

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