

Watch for Delta Aquariid meteors

They're the reason it's fun to begin watching for meteors in late July. The Delta Aquarid shower is long and rambling and overlaps with the Perseids.

Late July 2017 presents the nominal peak of the Delta Aquariid meteor shower, but this long-lived meteor shower rambles along steadily from about July 12 to August 23 each year. The full moon on August 7, 2017 means we'll have a waxing crescent moons at and near the peak dates of July 27 and 28. That's good! It means the moon will set at late evening, to provide moon-free skies between midnight and dawn, in late July. Late July is the time to watch meteors in 2017.

This shower overlaps with the more famous Perseid meteor shower. In 2017, the Perseids' peak is drowned in moonlight. So watch in late July for the Delta Aquarids, and see a few Perseids in the mix. Dark skies are best for watching meteor showers.

When and how should we watch the Delta Aquarid meteor shower? Does this shower have a peak? It does have a nominal peak in late July. In 2017, the rather wide waxing crescent moon doesn't intrude on the peak dates of July 27 and 28. The moon will set before midnight, and – as all true meteor-watchers know – the best meteor-viewing hours are after midnight and before dawn. For the Delta Aquarids, the best time is centered around 2am for all time zones around the world.

The Delta Aquarid meteors tend to appear a bit fainter than the Perseids and meteors seen in other major showers. That makes a dark sky free of moonlight even more imperative for watching the annual Delta Aquarid shower.

The Delta Aquarid shower is said to favor the Southern Hemisphere. But viewers at mid-northern latitudes will see

plenty of these meteors. **In years when the moon is out of the way, the broad maximum of this shower can be expected to produce 10 to 20 meteors per hour, under a dark country sky.**

About five to ten percent of the Delta Aquarid meteors leave persistent meteor trains – glowing ionized gas trails that last a second or two after the meteor has passed. The meteors burn up in the upper atmosphere about 100 km above the Earth's surface. Watch for their lingering trains!

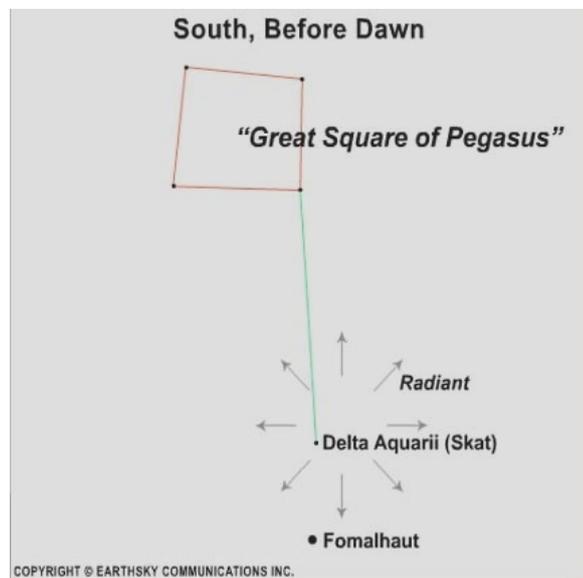
The Radiant point for Delta Aquarid shower is near star Skat, or Delta Aquarii. This star is near in the sky to a much brighter star, Fomalhaut, which can be found roughly on a line drawn southward through the stars on the west side of the Great Square.

How can I tell Perseid meteors from Delta Aquariid meteors? This is where the concept of a radiant point comes in handy. You never have to locate a shower's radiant point to enjoy the meteors. But ... if you trace all the Delta Aquariid meteors backward, they appear to radiate from a certain point in front of the constellation Aquarius the Water Bearer. It's overhead for Southern Hemisphere viewers (which is why the shower is best from that part of the world).

Meanwhile, Perseids radiate from the constellation Perseus. If you're in the Northern Hemisphere, and you're out watching for meteors, and you see meteors coming from the northeast or north ... they are Perseids. If you see them coming from the south ... they are Delta Aquariids.

If you're in the Southern Hemisphere, your Delta Aquarids will be radiating from nearly overhead. Your Perseids will be shooting up from somewhere along your northern horizon.

In a particularly rich year for meteors, if you have a dark sky, you might even see Perseid meteors cross paths with Delta Aquariid meteors! It can be an awesome display.



Comet 96P Machholz, the possible parent of the Delta Aquarid meteor shower, was discovered on May 12, 1986, by Donald Machholz