

## OMEGA CENTAURI

This May month let the sparkling blue-white star Spica and the very bright planet Jupiter act as your guide to the Omega Centauri globular star cluster.

You can see this cluster with the unaided eye, if your sky is dark enough. Omega Centauri looks like a fairly faint (and possibly fuzzy) star. It's a beautiful and very special star cluster.

In any year, Spica can help you find it, and, in 2017, Jupiter is also a wonderful guide.

To find Omega Centauri, first find Spica, the brightest star in the constellation Virgo the Maiden. How can you find it?

In 2017, Jupiter is very bright, brightest starlike object in the sky until Venus rises before dawn.

Find Jupiter, and Spica will be nearby. The squarish constellation Corvus the Crow is also near.

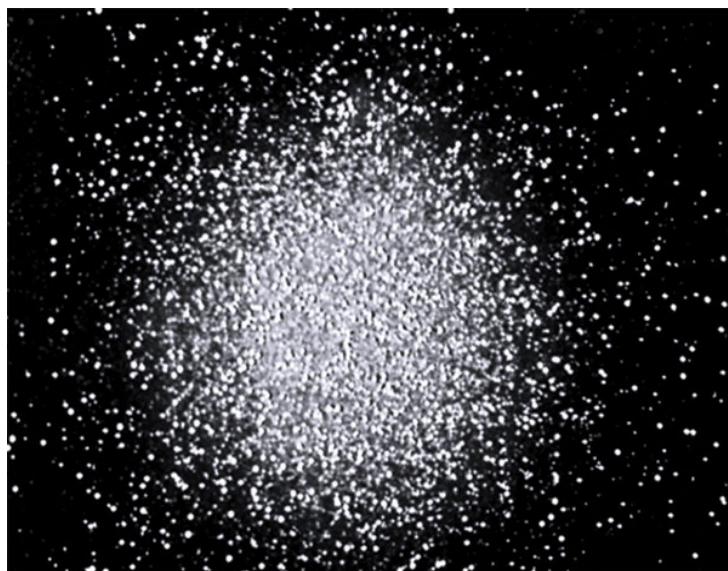
Spica transits – climbs to its highest point in the sky – in mid-May for all locations around the globe. As seen from the Northern Hemisphere, Spica and Omega Centauri transit due south at the same time. That means that – when Spica is highest in the south – Omega Centauri is, too.

Look for Omega Centauri about  $35^\circ$  directly below Spica (a fist at an arm-length is approximately 10 degrees).

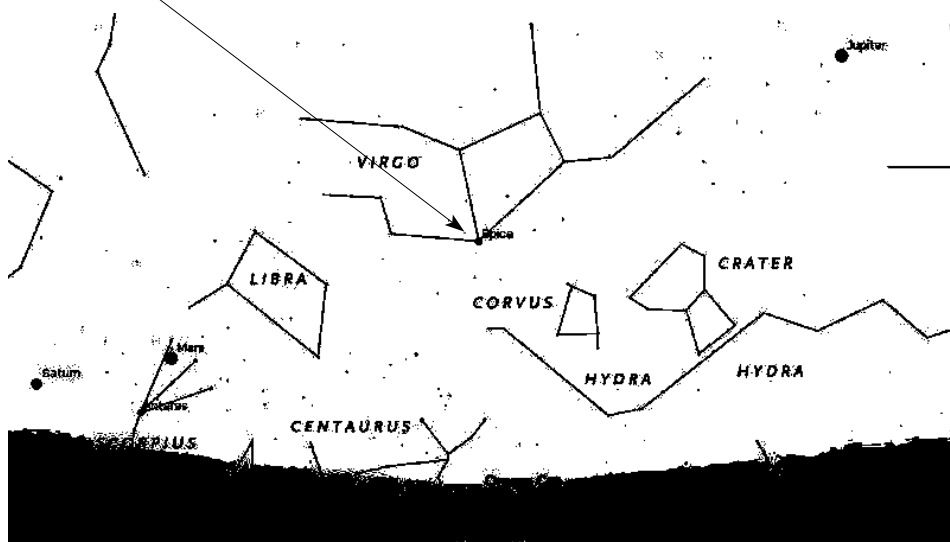
Even at its highest, Omega Centauri is low in the south for Northern Hemisphere observers. But it's conveniently just below the bright star Spica. Finding Spica can lead you to this magnificent star cluster. Omega Centauri is special in part because you can see it with your eye alone, assuming you have a dark-enough sky. Very few of the Milky Way galaxy's 250 or so globular star clusters are readily visible without optics.

Globular clusters are large, symmetrically shaped groupings of stars, fairly evenly distributed around the core of our Milky Way galaxy. **Omega Centauri is the largest globular and finest globular star cluster visible to the eye alone.** It is a globe-shaped stellar city, teeming with millions of stars!

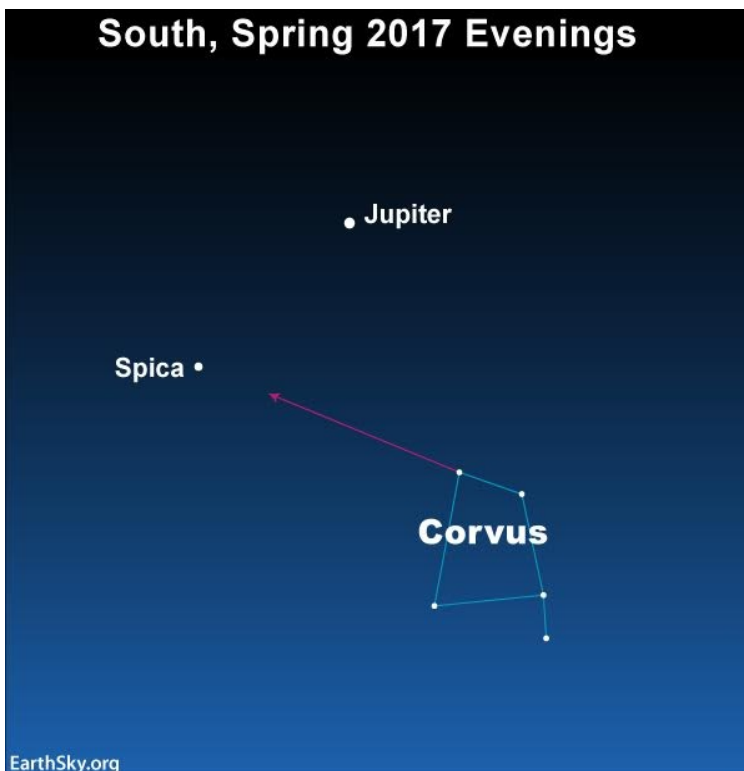
People living south of  $35^\circ$  north latitude have a realistic chance of spotting Omega Centauri. It is best appreciated with a telescope.



Omega Centauri star cluster, the finest globular star cluster visible in Earth's skies



## South, Spring 2017 Evenings



Use Jupiter and the star Spica in the constellation Virgo to locate Omega Centauri on these nights

AK, with EarthSky Notes