



NGC 2392

Type: Planetary Nebula

Constellation: Gemini

Distance: 2,900 light-years

Magnitude: 9.1

Apparent Diameter: 0.8'

Winter's best planetary nebula is, arguably, NGC 2392, the Clown Face Nebula. It can be found in the constellation Gemini, within the same binocular field of view as the bright star Wasat. That said, you'll need a scope to spot this object for yourself and, despite having an apparent diameter that rivals Jupiter's, it might seem a little underwhelming at first.

A small scope will show it as a tiny, hazy circle, but its relatively bright central star should still be easily visible. Be on the lookout for a bluish tint, while larger scopes will show a dark ring surrounding the central area. Lastly, try staring at the central star until the disk disappears and then glancing quickly away - does it appear to suddenly blink back again?

Image Source: NASA, ESA, Andrew Fruchter (STScI), and the ERO team (STScI + ST-ECF)

OUR NEAREST NEIGHBORS

Both **Saturn** and **Neptune** are now too close to the Sun to be visible. Saturn will reach conjunction on the 17th, with Neptune reaching the same point next month. **Venus**, however, continues to edge into the evening twilight sky, with the planet shining brilliantly at magnitude -3.4 in the west after sunset. Look for the waxing crescent Moon below it on the 21st and within the same binocular field of view as **Jupiter** from about the 23rd onward. Jupiter itself is now long past its best and will set just a few hours after the Sun by month's end, with the crescent Moon appearing to its left on the 22nd. **Uranus** is also losing ground to the Sun, but you should be able to observe it for a few hours once the sky turns dark. **Mars** starts at magnitude -0.4 on the 1st, reaches magnitude 0.0 on the 10th, and ends February at magnitude 0.4. Try comparing its brightness to the stars Capella in Auriga and Procyon in Canis Minor. A first quarter Moon appears just to the west of the planet on the 27th. Lastly, **the Moon** turns full on the 5th and then new on the 20th.

Alpha Geminorum - Castor: The second-brightest star in Gemini, Castor is a great multiple star for scopes of almost any aperture. This is quite an appropriate star for the constellation of the twins, as both components appear white and of almost equal brightness.

NGC 2362: Also known as the Northern Jewel Box, this is one of the gems of the winter sky. You can spot it with binoculars, but the cluster is best observed with a telescope. At 35x, Tau sits near the center of a dense, triangular group of fainter blue-white stars of uniform brightness.

Messier 47: M47 can be spotted within the same binocular field of view as M46 and is the brighter and more westerly of the two. Telescopically, it appears large and sparse, with stars of varying brightness and a close double at its center.

NGC 2403: This face-on galaxy is detectable with most scopes. A small telescope will show an elongated, hazy patch with a bright core, mid-sized scopes can show a number of faint stars within the halo, and a large scope will reveal some texture.

NGC 2403

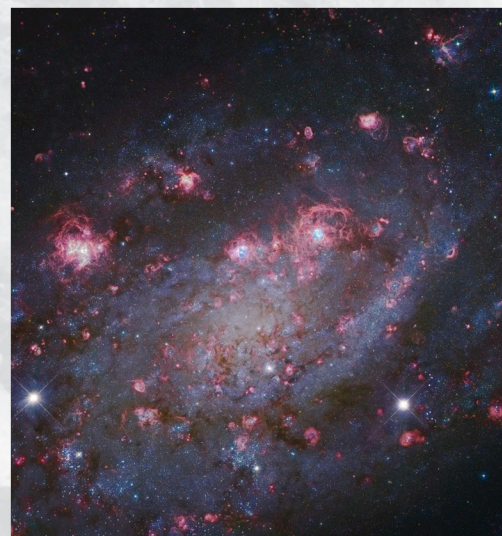


Image Source: ESA/Hubble