

Meteor show reaches dazzling peak



The Perseids occur when Earth passes through dusty material from a comet

Skygazers are observing a dazzling sky show, as the annual Perseid meteor shower reaches its peak.

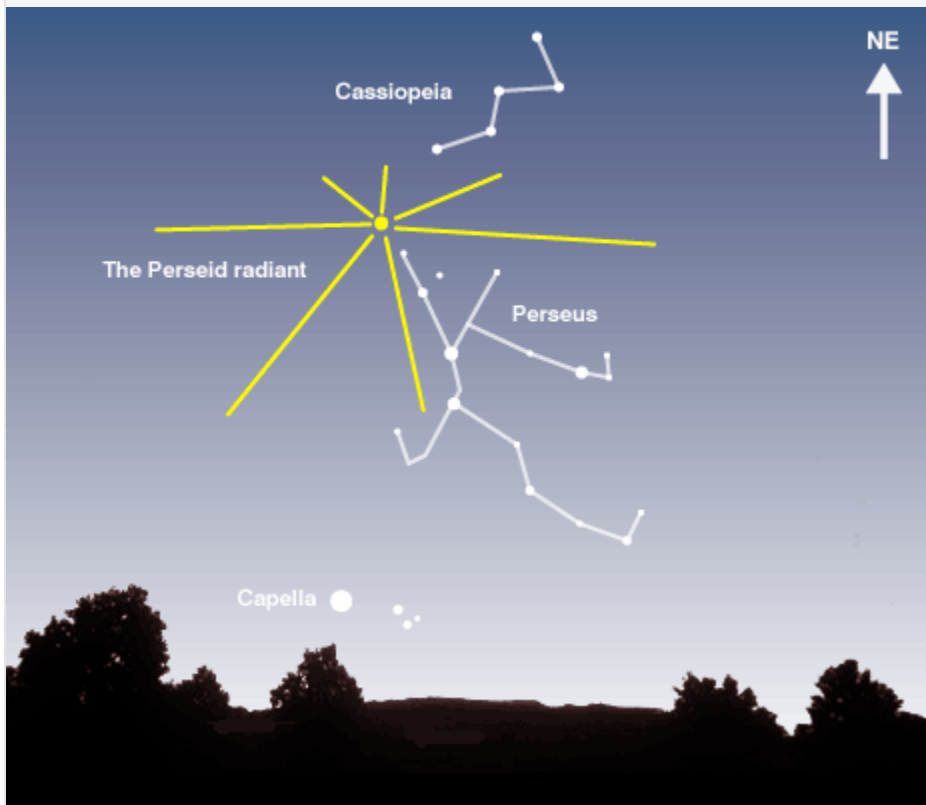
No special equipment is required to watch the shower, which occurs when Earth passes through a stream of dusty debris from the comet Swift-Tuttle.

Budding astronomers are advised to lie on a blanket or a reclining chair to get the best view.

The National Trust has released online guides to seven top Perseid viewing sites in the UK.

As the cometary "grit" from Swift-Tuttle strikes our atmosphere, it burns up, often creating streaks of light across the sky.

PERSEID METEOR SHOWER



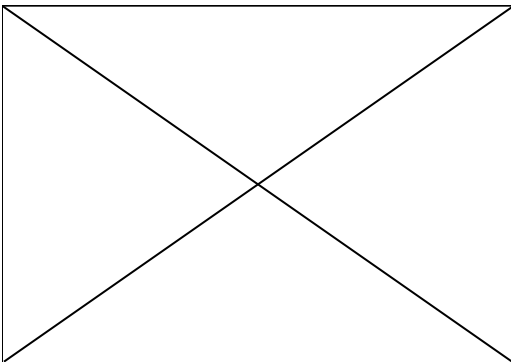
The tails of the Perseids point back to a "radiant" in the constellation Perseus

They can appear anywhere in the sky

Perseids consist of dusty debris from Comet Swift-Tuttle

The meteors appear to come from a point called a "radiant" in the constellation of Perseus - hence the name Perseid.

The late evening on 12 August through to the early hours of the 13 August is the best time to see the shower. In North America, the best time to watch is before dawn on Wednesday.



Meteor shower forecast

Astronomers say up to 100 meteors per hour are expected to streak across the sky during the shower's peak.

But this year, light from the last quarter Moon has been predicted to interfere significantly with the view.

Astronomers say binoculars might help with viewing the spectacle, but will also restrict the view to a small part of the sky.

The Perseids can appear in any part of the sky, but their tails all point back to the radiant in the constellation Perseus.

The National Trust has published online guides to seven top Perseid viewing sites for England and Wales, including coastal spots, nature reserves and national parks.

Jo Burgon, head of access and recreation at the Trust, said: "Light pollution from our towns and cities has increased so much in recent years, but head out to the countryside for the perfect place to explore the beauty of the night sky, away from the intrusive glow."

Skywatchers are taking part in the first "Twitter Meteorwatch". People around the world have been live-tweeting images of the meteors, as well as pictures of the Moon, Jupiter and other celestial objects.

The "48-hour Twitter marathon" forms part of the International Year of Astronomy 2009 (IYA2009).

The rock and dust fragments which cause the shower were left behind by Comet Swift-Tuttle when it last came near the Sun.

The comet orbits the Sun once every 130 years and last swept through the inner Solar System in 1992.

NATIONAL TRUST'S SEVEN BEST SITES

Black Down in Sussex
Teign Valley in Devon
Penbryn Beach in Wales
Stonehenge Landscape in Wiltshire
Wicken Fen National Nature Reserve in Cambridgeshire
Mam Tor in Derbyshire
Friar's Crag in Cumbria

[Your pictures of the meteors](#)