Four planets before dawn in November 2026: worth an early alarm?

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Mid-November 2026 mornings bring Venus, Mars and Jupiter before sunrise, Mars and Jupiter a finger apart around 15 November, and Mercury low in the east.

Yes, if your child is up before sunrise anyway. In mid-November 2026, Venus, Mars and Jupiter are in the morning sky, and around 15 November Mars and Jupiter are only about 1.2 degrees apart, roughly a finger's width at arm's length, high in the south-east. Mercury joins very low in the east from about 16 to 25 November. Peabody's event page has the countdown.

Where to look

About 45 minutes before sunrise:

- Jupiter and Mars: high in the south-east, about six fists up. Jupiter is the bright white one; Mars, right beside it, is smaller and orange.
- Venus: low in the east-south-east, one to two fists up, very bright.
- Mercury: just above the horizon in the east, below and left of Venus. You need a flat, clear view and a bit of luck; it reaches its best morning showing on 20 November but stays under about ten degrees high.

Why they look close

They aren't. Mars is a few hundred million kilometers from Jupiter; they just line up from where we stand. Each night Mars slides a little past Jupiter, so looking on two or three mornings shows a planet moving against another.

Which is which

Brightness sorts them. From our sky table, in mid-November:

- Venus is by far the brightest, brighter than anything else in the sky but the Sun and Moon.
- Jupiter comes next: very bright, white and steady.
- Mercury is as bright as one of the brightest stars, but so low that the glow of dawn often hides it.
- Mars is the faintest of the four, orange, and about as bright as Saturn in the evening sky.

Mars is getting brighter every week. By Christmas it is about twice as bright as in mid-November, and it keeps brightening until about February 2027, when it is at its best.

If you only have five minutes

Find Venus first: the brightest thing low in the east-south-east, hard to miss. Then turn to the south-east and look high, about six fists up, for Jupiter, with Mars right beside it. Skip Mercury unless your view of the eastern horizon is flat and open.

Watch Mars move

This is the part a child can measure. On two or three clear mornings a few days apart, at the same time each morning, draw Jupiter and Mars on one sheet of paper, with a roof edge or a tree as a marker. In our table, for the middle of the country, Mars sits just above Jupiter around 12 November and has moved to Jupiter's left by about 20 November. Jupiter moves too, but far more slowly. The Greek word that gave us "planet" meant wanderer, and this is the wandering.

What to say when a child asks why they don't twinkle

Stars are so far away that each one is a single point of light, and moving air bends that point about, so it twinkles. Planets are close enough to be tiny discs, and the wobbles average out. That's why the steadiest bright points in the dawn sky are the planets.

Make it a morning

The Leonid meteor shower peaks on the night of 16–17 November, and its best hour is the same hour before dawn. One alarm, two things to see. Dress warmly: November dawns are the coldest part of the night.

Three questions grown-ups ask

Is this a "planet alignment"? Planets always lie along roughly one line across the sky, because they orbit in nearly the same plane. This is a nice grouping, not a rare event.

Do we need binoculars? No. Binoculars do show Jupiter's four big moons as tiny dots in a row, if you have a pair.

What if we miss it? Mars and Jupiter stay up in the mornings all of December, and on 27 and 28 December the Moon passes right by them.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up, and nothing your child taps on the space pages is sent anywhere. Back inside before school, the library has short stories at your child's reading level.

Sources

- Positions, the 1.2° gap and Mercury's elongation from astronomy-engine (MIT license), worked out for Denver; the directions hold across the US.

• Brightness, and Mars and Jupiter morning by morning, from Peabody's sky table, worked out with the same library for the middle of each 5° square.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/planets-before-dawn-november-2026