

Can you planet?

Why is a planet called a planet?
You can discover why for yourself simply by stepping outside in August 2024. This is when Mercury and Venus will appear together low above the North Western horizon.

Right: Moon, Mercury and Venus finder chart for Sydney NSW. Chart for 6.15 pm AEST 6 August 2024. Produced using Stellarium.



It turns out that we have the ancient Greeks to thank for this name. It is a name that means 'wandering stars' or 'wanderers'. They noticed that five stars moved of their own accord compared to the many thousands of stars that don't.

Go back in time by stepping outside in between 3 and 9 August 2024. Watch as the two planets move near each other. Their movement is caused by a combination of their orbits around the Sun and the Earth moving in its orbit.

Use the chart at right to record Mercury and Venus movement relative to the stars. Step outside at 6.15 pm AEST with the chart and a pen and look North West. Mark on the lines where Mercury and Venus are. Repeat the process a few nights later. You will discover that they have moved over this period.

The chart is prepared for an observer in Sydney, NSW. It will be useful for other locations in Eastern Australia.

