

So you want a telescope

After finding out I have a telescope, and of my interest in Astronomy, I am often asked "What kind of telescope should I get my (self, kid, spouse, father, fill in the blank). My first thought is to say they can buy mine so I can get a bigger, better, different telescope. But in reality, the best answer is usually to get a good astronomy book.

Unless you are exactly like me, you will need to get a foundation of what is in the sky before you drag out a telescope. Going out on clear nights with just a lawn chair and your eyes will give you an indication if you actually want a telescope. There are many uncomfortable aspects of sky watching and astronomy. If you add to this lugging and setting up a telescope, you may find you really don't want to do this.

Spring in Ohio is a good time to start with your quest for a telescope. The clear nights are becoming a bit warmer from the winter deep chills, and the bugs aren't out as much. If you can take the few mosquitoes and the slightly chilly nature of the spring nights, you can then look forward to the summer nights. In most cases the summer nights in Ohio are quite comfortable for watching the night sky. If someone could do something about all the mosquitoes. Yes, you will be a target of these blood thirsty little creatures. Then there are the numerous encounters with other wildlife. Skunks will generally not spray, unless you scare them. Stepping on a skunk tends to scare it. Raccoons on the other hand don't fear much. Keep the snacks well sealed, and don't leave your car open. In NW Ohio that is all you generally have to worry about. But I did hear talk of a wandering Black Bear in the area!

Other parts of the country will have their own night time problems. Scorpions, cougars, wolves, bears, poisonous snakes, and the strange people who come out at night in our larger metropolitan areas, are all possible things you could run into

trying to look at the night sky. Do you really wonder why I don't automatically tell a person which telescope to buy.

Astronomy and star watching is not for everyone. We are a strange breed. We tend to enjoy being out in the dark (the darker the better), communing with the wild, lugging heavy equipment out for maybe 2-4 hours of finding and studying a specific nebulae or feature on the Moon. Then we will pack up and lug that equipment back in. If you can't spend 1/2 hour after lugging your lawn chair out just to look at the sky, well this hobby isn't really for you. A telescope really won't help.

Ok, you got past the looking at the stars for 1/2 hour, and you enjoyed it. What next? Get a good astronomy book. Take the time to learn what is up there. Before you get a telescope you need to know what you're going to be looking at. Astronomy books and star charts are the road maps to the night sky. You should be able to find at least 1 or 2 constellations before you purchase that scope. Checkout [Sky and Telescope](#) or [Astronomy Magazines](#) at your local library or bookstore. They will have a sky map of the current month.

You say you've done all that and still want a telescope? Now we're talking. Get some good binoculars and come back in a month or two. □ No really, I wish someone had told me that at the beginning of my astronomy connection. I still don't have a good pair of binoculars, and my desire for them is growing. 7×50, 8×50 and 10×50 are all good binoculars to start with in astronomy. Oh yes, the first number is the magnification of the binoculars (7 times, 8 times or 10 times) the second number is the size of the front lens in millimeters. The bigger front lens collects more light, and the higher magnification allows you to see more. 2 big notes!! High magnification may seem like a good thing, but too much causes what I call the jitters. It is hard to hold binoculars steady, high magnification makes this much more apparent. And bigger front lenses may also seem like a good idea. Bigger lenses,

means the binoculars will weigh more. Heavy binoculars also cause the jitters.

Ok, Ok you got this far? You should get a 7 inch Questar Maksutov. Make sure you get a well built tripod with this since this telescope needs good support. And when you get tired of astronomy let me know, I may have a home for your scope... That's just a joke folks. When you find out what that telescope costs you may understand. For the real answer, stop back in the future. I work up a list of good beginner scopes.