



UPGRADE

BY ERIN MCCARTHY

GEAR UP Amateur Astronomy

If you want to wish upon a star, first you need to track it down. Here's your stargazer's starter kit. —DALENE ROVENSTINE



1. SCOPE IT OUT

Many avid astronomers start with the **AstroMaster 114EQ** (\$250). Markings on the equatorial mount aid object location; a 4.5-inch aperture brings planets, stars, and nebulae into clear view.

2. NIGHT LIGHT

Hands-free illumination is key when trekking to your star-watching spot and setting up. **Petzl's Tactikka XP Adapt headlamp** (\$60) also attaches to a belt or pocket; a red filter gives night vision.

3. STAR SEEKER

Find what you're looking for with **Southern Stars' SkySafari 3 App** for iPhone, iPod, and iPad. The basic version (\$3) has a built-in compass and gyroscope, and catalogs 46,000 objects.

4. COOL AID

The double steel walls of **S'well bottles** (\$35 for 17 ounces; \$45 for 25 ounces) keep liquids hot for 12 hours or cold for 24 hours sans scalded hands or slippery condensation.

5. BUG BLOCKER

In our test, body parts covered by **Columbia's Bug Shield Mesh Jacket** (\$90) were bite-free after 30 minutes in the woods at night. We wish there were a hazmat suit made with this fabric.

6. SOLID FOOTING

The best stargazing takes place off the beaten path (thanks, light pollution!). Navigate tricky terrain in **L.L. Bean's comfortable-as-sneakers Waterproof Trail Model Hiker midcut boots** (\$99).

UPCOMING METEOR SHOWERS

JULY 28-29: Delta Aquarids; peak 20/hour; best viewed 2 hours before dawn.
AUGUST 12-13: Perseids; peak 50/hour; best viewed after midnight.