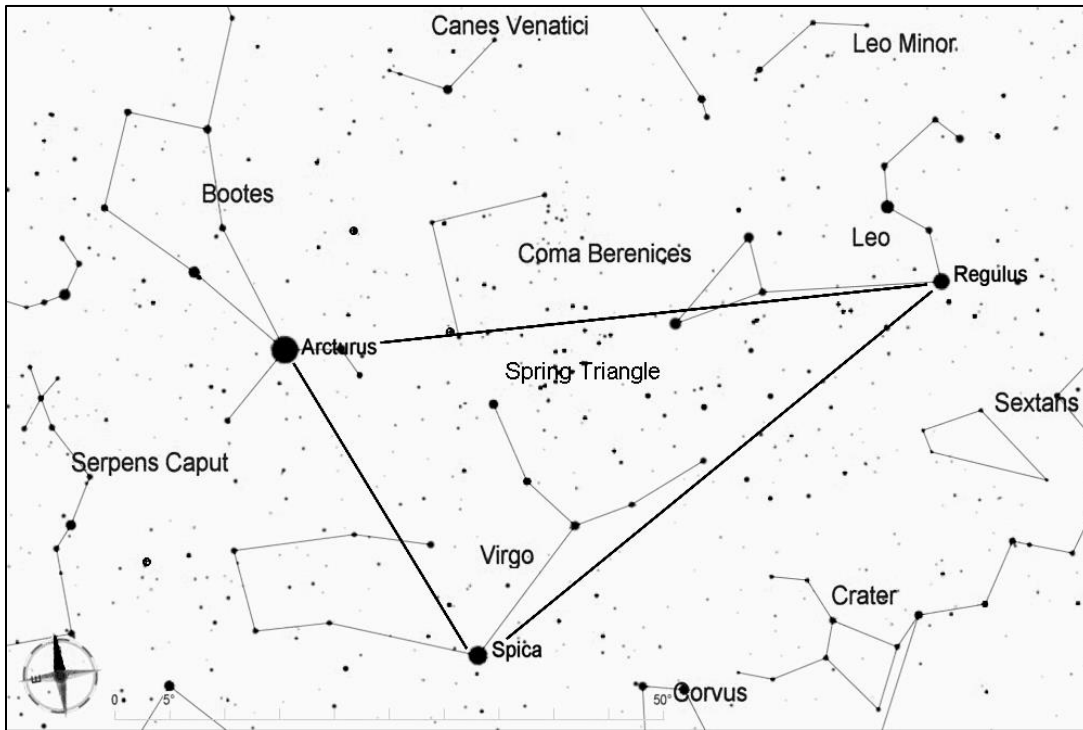


Messier 44, the Beehive Cluster

The Beehive is one of the nearest open clusters, about 610 light years away. It is visible to the naked eye as a large hazy patch in the center of the dim constellation Cancer, about twice the diameter of the full Moon. Because of its large size, it is best viewed through binoculars or a small telescope at low power.



Start by finding the Spring Triangle, which consists of three widely-separated first magnitude stars--Arcturus, Spica, and Regulus. The Spring Triangle is high in the southeast sky in early spring, and in the southwest sky by mid-Summer. (To get oriented, you can use the handle of the Big Dipper and "follow the arc to Arcturus").

For this star hop, begin at Regulus in the constellation Leo, the lion.

The dim constellation Cancer, the crab, has no stars brighter than magnitude 3.5. As shown below, the constellation is located about half way between Regulus and first-magnitude Pollux in Gemini. From Regulus, look about 15 degrees to the northwest to find δ Cancri, a magnitude 4 star in the center of Cancer. The Beehive is about a degree to the north of δ Cancri. If you can't see it with the naked eye, it will be obvious in binoculars or a finderscope.

