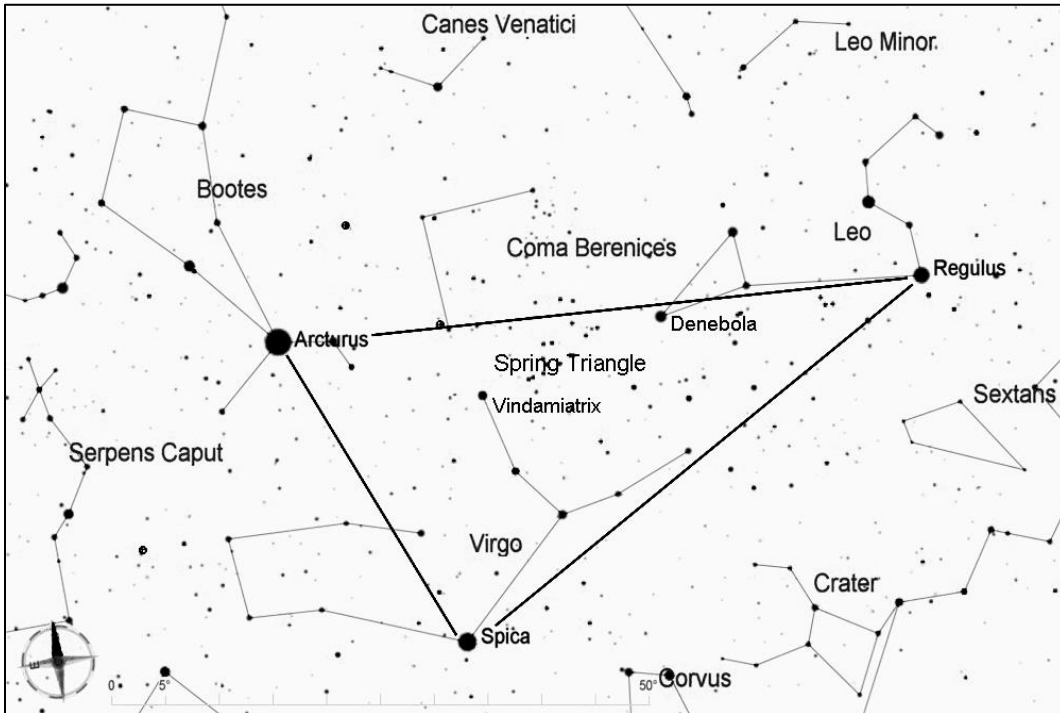


Messier 61, Oriani's Galaxy

This beautiful face-on barred spiral galaxy was discovered in 1779 by Barnabas Oriani, a Catholic priest and accomplished astronomer, and it became the 61st entry in Messier's catalog. It is on the southern outskirts of the Virgo galaxy cluster. Through small scopes, it appears as a circular glow with a brighter center. Large scopes will show its two large spiral arms.



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, look in the middle of the Spring Triangle for Denebola, the star representing the back end of Leo, the lion, and Vindemiatrix, a magnitude 2.8 star in Virgo. The galaxies of the Virgo cluster are found in the area between these two stars.

From Vindemiatrix, trace the curving arc of stars that form part of the constellation Virgo to reach Zaniah, as shown below. All of these stars should be easy to see with the naked eye under a clear sky. From Zaniah, move 4 degrees north to a 5th magnitude star that will be easily visible in binoculars or a finderscope. Center this star in your telescope with a low-power eyepiece, then move a little more than 1 degree to the north-northeast to reach M61.

