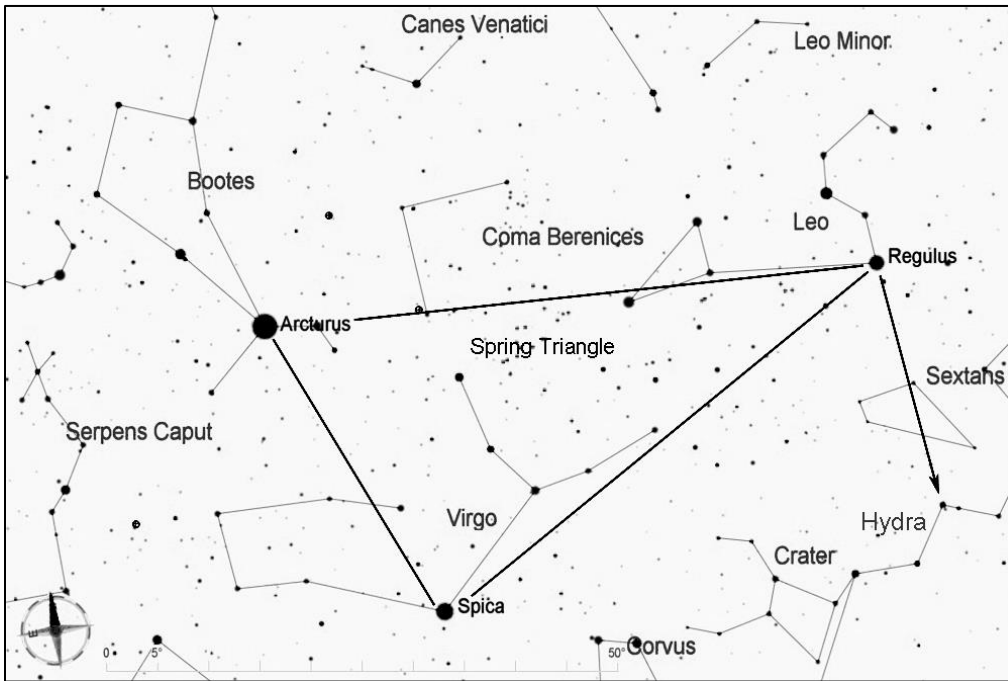


NGC 3242 (Caldwell 59), the Ghost of Jupiter in Hydra

The Ghost of Jupiter is a planetary nebula, the remnant of an old star. It has a disk roughly the apparent size of Jupiter, but it is pale and bluish in color. At magnitude 7.3, it will be visible in any telescope. Use high magnification to see its oval shape. Larger scopes will show the star in its center and some detail in the surface of the disk. This nebula is about 3600 light years away.



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. Look about 30 degrees south of Regulus for the zig-zag constellation of Hydra.

The brightest star in Hydra, the water snake, is 2nd magnitude Alphard, easily visible to the naked eye. From Alphard, look east and follow a zig-zag line of stars that form part of the slithering body of Hydra to reach μ (mu) Hydrae, magnitude 3.8. Less than 2 degrees south of μ Hydrae is the Ghost of Jupiter. Through a telescope, its bluish color should help to distinguish it from nearby stars.

