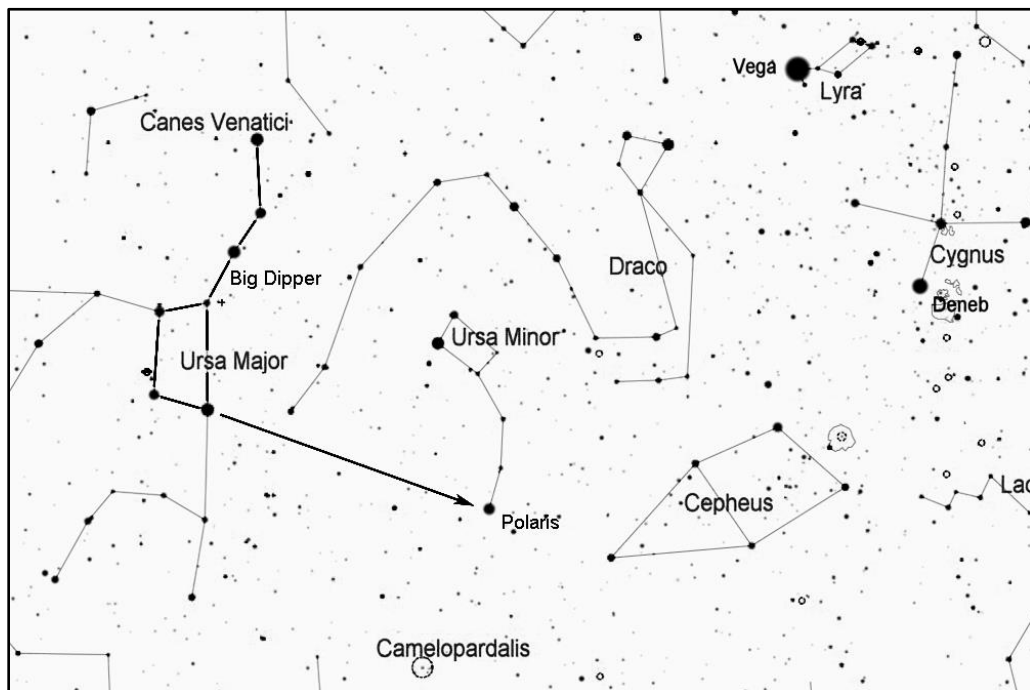


Polaris (the North Star) and the Engagement Ring Asterism

Contrary to a common misconception, Polaris is NOT the brightest star in the sky. At magnitude 2.0, it is the 48th brightest star. It also has a much dimmer companion, magnitude 9.1, that is 18 arcseconds away. This is almost a 700-fold difference in brightness. Polaris is part of an asterism known as the Engagement Ring. Polaris is seen as the diamond, and an irregular circle of much dimmer stars form a bent ring shape, about 3/4 degree across.



Start by finding the Big Dipper, one of the most recognizable star patterns in the sky. It is part of the constellation Ursa Major, the big bear. It is shown here on its side, as it appears on early evenings in the fall. For other seasons and times of night, rotate the chart as needed to match what you see in the northern sky.

Finding Polaris may be the best-known star hop of all: The two stars at the end of Big Dipper's bowl are called "the pointers" because they point to Polaris, about 30 degrees away.

Once you have centered on Polaris, it is good to use fairly high power to help see its dim companion. But use a low-power eyepiece to view the entire Engagement Ring. Note the orientation of the Engagement Ring relative to Yildun, the star nearest to Polaris in the handle of the Little Dipper.

