Venus Shows Its Bright Horns in the Evening Sky

NASA's daily space image shows why Venus can look like a tiny crescent, not a round dot.

A bright crescent Venus glows in a purple twilight sky above a quiet horizon.

NASA shared a new sky image today showing Venus as a thin, glowing **crescent**. According to NASA's Astronomy Picture of the Day, the bright **planet** can look a little like a tiny Moon.

This happens because Venus has phases. A **phase** is the shape we see when **sunlight** hits part of an object in space. The Moon has phases, such as crescent, half, and full. Venus can show phases too.

In the image, Venus was almost in a straight line between Earth and the Sun. That kind of lineup happens for Venus about once every year and a half. It is a little like the lineup during a new Moon.

But a new Moon is hard to see. The lit side faces away from Earth. Venus is different because it has an atmosphere. An atmosphere is a layer of gases around a planet.

Sunlight passes through the edge of Venus's atmosphere. The light bends and spreads there. Scientists call that **bending** refraction. They call the spreading scattering. Together, these effects make the crescent of Venus glow.

The glow can stretch farther than a half circle. The two bright tips are called the horns of Venus. They are not real horns, of course. They are the bright ends of the crescent shape.

A person looking at **twilight** might see only a bright dot. Twilight is the time after sunset or before sunrise, when the sky is not fully dark. With binoculars or a small telescope, Venus can show its crescent shape. NASA says some people with very sharp eyesight may see it without tools.

Long ago, sky watchers noticed Venus changing brightness. NASA says ancient Babylonian astronomers may have studied these changes. Other cultures kept records too, including the Maya.

That makes the picture more than a pretty view. It shows how careful looking can turn a dot in the sky into a clue. The same planet can seem simple from far away and surprising through the right tool.

Written from reporting by NASA.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. **Is a telescope or binoculars more like a toy, a tool, or both in this story? Defend your answer.**

2. **Why might ancient people have thought Venus was important enough to watch and record?**

3. **If a class could observe only one object at twilight, should it choose the Moon or Venus? Explain the trade-off.**

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G	R	S	S	L	I	A	C	P	T	N	A
L	S	R	T	Y	W	O	W	H	Y	M	H
G	C	U	B	E	N	D	I	N	G	N	H
E	A	H	N	G	B	C	W	A	S	E	A
P	T	W	I	L	I	G	H	T	D	B	P
O	T	G	Y	P	I	C	G	H	P	D	A
M	E	X	L	I	N	G	I	I	I	P	A
R	R	A	R	T	E	P	H	A	S	E	A
T	C	R	E	S	C	E	N	T	G	D	S
C	T	O	T	E	E	N	B	D	T	S	L
E	N	A	E	G	I	H	L	G	G	L	I
N	A	S	H	U	H	P	L	A	N	E	T

BENDING CRESCENT PHASE PLANET SCATTER

SUNLIGHT TWILIGHT

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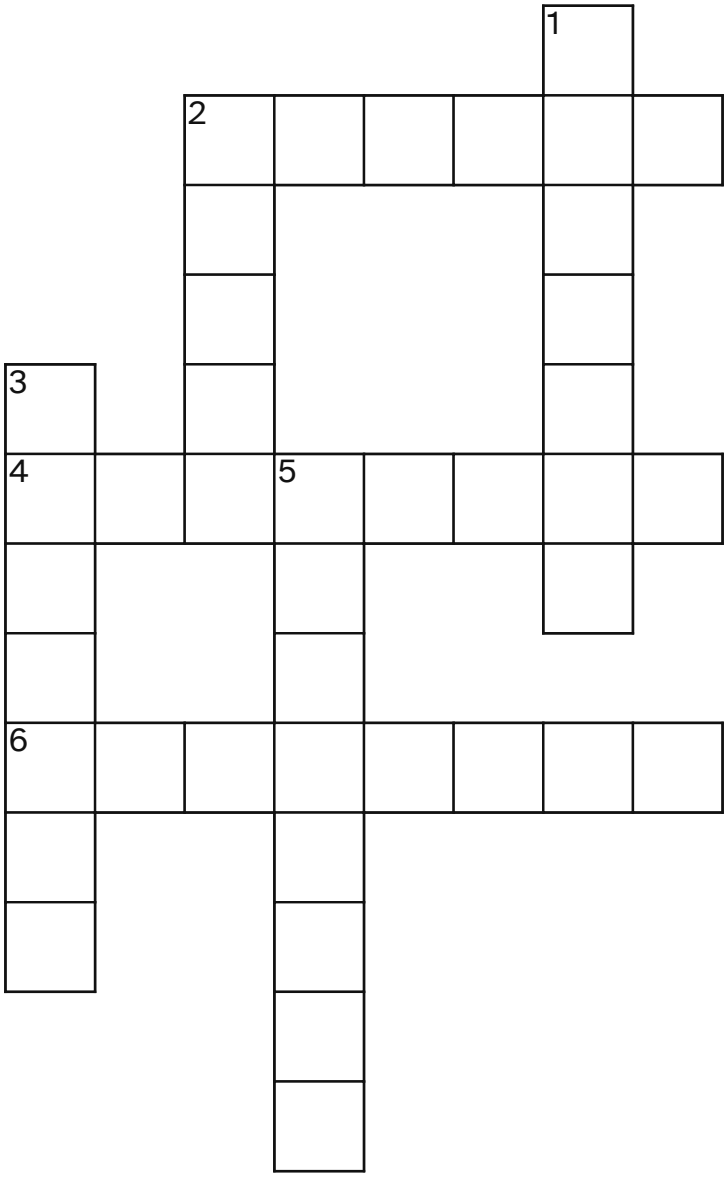

ACROSS

2 Big round space body that goes around a star

4 Thin moonlike curve with sharp tips

6 Dim sky time before morning or after evening

DOWN

1 Light changing direction while passing through material

2 Changing look of a world or moon as it circles

3 Spread out in many directions

5 Rays from the star at the center of our solar system

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Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

NASA

"APOD: 29 October 2026 – The Horns of Venus"

Published	Thursday, October 29, 2026
Read by us on	Thursday, October 29, 2026

https://science.nasa.gov/image-article/apod-29-october-2026-the-horns-of-venus/

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The article and its discussion questions, a word search, and a crossword.

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