

7 Spica in the constellation Virgo

Distance

250 light years

Luminosity

20,500 times that of the sun

Colour

Blue-white

Surface temperature

25,300 K

Diameter

7.5 times the diameter of the sun

(To Planet Trail scale: 10.5 m)

Mass

11.4 solar masses

Evening visibility

March to May

Spica is the brightest star in the constellation Virgo and the tenth brightest star we can see in the sky. Spica is a binary star system. Both stars orbit each other so closely that they appear as a single star, even when viewed through the largest of telescopes. Both are main sequence stars and extremely hot. They emit most of their energy within the ultraviolet spectral range. The above data refers to Spica A, whose luminosity is about ten times that of Spica B.

The constellation Virgo gives its name to the corresponding sign of the zodiac. This means that, seen from Earth, our sun passes by the constellation over several weeks in the daytime sky. Spica occasionally gets covered by the moon but rarely by planets. It will be 2197 when Venus next occults the star.

Spica forms the Spring Triangle together with Arcturus in Bootes and Regulus in the constellation Leo.

Other bright stars in the constellation Virgo:

Vindemiatrix Distance: 102 light years

Heze Distance: 73 light years

Minelauva Distance: 200 light years

Zavijava Distance: 36 light years

7 Constellation Virgo

Virgo is an extremely large constellation that is seen in the southern sky on spring evenings. It can be found closer to the horizon between the constellations Bootes and Leo. Spica is by far the brightest star. Seen from Earth, the sun, moon and planets pass by the constellation. The sun spends time in this constellation from mid September to the end of October. The constellation contains a galaxy cluster with over 2,000 galaxies. It is possible to see several of them using only a small telescope.

Spica translates as ear of corn. Following a few months in the daytime sky, Spica once again becomes visible in the morning sky in autumn. Around 4,000 years ago, this coincided with the start of the grain harvest. The constellation is generally depicted as a reclining woman with a palm branch in one hand and several ears of grain in the other.

Greek mythology tells the following story about the constellation.

It concerns Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, the goddess of fertility. Persephone was abducted by Hades, the god of the underworld, who then married her. Demeter was so unhappy about this that she neglected her duties. Harvests failed and famine ensued as a result. Zeus came up with a solution. Persephone would spend part of the year with her mother and the rest with her husband. When she is in the underworld, the weather is cold and wet and the trees drop their leaves. When she returns above ground, nature springs back to life.