

An image of the Earth is projected on the wall of the Slippery Rock University planetarium. The Earth's position in relationship to the sun is lining up for the March 20 vernal equinox, the official start of spring. The increase in solar energy striking the Earth's surface should herald higher temperatures.

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Let There Be Light

Daylight-saving time a harbinger of spring

By Eric Freehling, Eagle Focus Editor

During our current spate of snow, rain, freezing rain the dreaded “wintry mix” and more snow, any sign of spring would be a welcome one.

One herald of the hypothetical warmer days ahead arrived at 2 a.m. when most of the country turned their clocks ahead one hour to daylight-saving time.

Many have already noticed that the days are staying lighter later, thanks to the normal course of the Earth's movements in relation to the sun, but daylight-saving time accelerates the process.

That process comes to a head at 6:45 p.m. March 20 with the arrival of the vernal equinox, according to James Clem, assistant professor of physics at Grove City College.

The vernal equinox has an astronomical significance, he said, because it corresponds to the date (and time) when the sun crosses the celestial equator, an imaginary line in the sky directly over equator, traveling south to north.

On that day, almost all points on the Earth will experience a nearly equal number of daylight and nighttime hours (i.e., 12 hours of day and 12 hours of night — the term “equinox” literally translates as “equal night”).

“Many people, not just astronomers, have adopted the day the vernal equinox occurs as the ‘first official day of spring’ because it has a couple of consequences for people living in the northern hemisphere of Earth that are relevant to the seasonal change from winter to spring,” said Clem.

Ancient cultures took notice of days such as the vernal equinox on their ‘calendars’ because they were important for agricultural and religious/cultural reasons, among others.’

James Clem,

Grove City College assistant professor of physics

For example, he said, the sun rises earlier and sets later each day and follows a higher path in the sky giving rise to longer days and shorter nights.

This means more solar energy strikes the Earth's surface as the sun climbs higher in the sky and, combined with the longer daylight, leads to more efficient heating of the Earth's surface that can bring about an increase in air temperatures (i.e., an overall warming trend).

But it's a gradual process, warned Julie Snow, associate professor of geography, geology and environment at Slippery Rock University.

“In my mind, the sun's rays at 90 degrees hitting the equator is the vernal equinox,” said Snow.

“But that doesn't mean we won't get snow in April,” she said. “It takes time for the planet to absorb that energy.”

“And the key is energy. We talk about temperature but temperature is a measure of kinetic energy,” said Snow.

Clem said, “Ancient cultures took notice of days such as the vernal

equinox on their calendars because they were important for agricultural and religious/cultural reasons, among others.”

“Numerous ancient civilizations held the vernal equinox in great importance — these include the Egyptians, Persians, and Mayans to name a few,” he said.

For some, the vernal equinox was a time of celebration because it signaled that a time would be approaching when they could begin to plant crops and replenish their food supply, he added.

But Luke Fritz, the executive director of the USDA Farm Service Agency which administers federal farm programs in Butler County, said the county's 800 to 900 farmers are still more than a month away from actually getting into their fields.

“I'm sure some are starting seeds in greenhouses or purchasing fertilizer, seeds and pesticides or performing maintenance on their equipment,” said Fritz.

The vernal equinox is not just important to farmers. The fathers of the early Christian church used it to

determine the date of Easter, said the Rev. Philip Farrell, episcopal vicar for Region Four of the Pittsburgh Diocese.

Farrell said, “The date of Easter is based on the resurrection of Jesus, three days after the crucifixion which occurred on Passover, but much debate arose when trying to fix this date annually.”

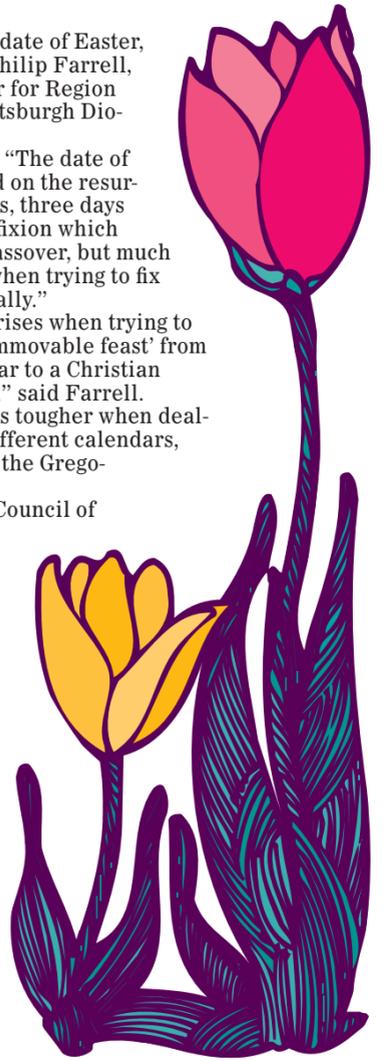
“Difficulty arises when trying to translate an ‘immovable feast’ from a lunar calendar to a Christian solar calendar,” said Farrell.

“And it grows tougher when dealing with two different calendars, the Julian and the Gregorian,” he said.

Finally, the Council of Nicaea in A.D.

325 placed Easter on the first Sunday following the first full moon after the vernal equinox.

Farrell said church tradition holds that this process was chosen to allow pilgrims to have ample moonlight to travel to the great Easter festivals of the



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Land of Nod's Isosceles rug pairs the punch of a graphic motif with pastel hues and soft finish underfoot.

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SPRING DECOR TRENDS

Modern mix with a dash of Marsala

By Associated Press

Spring is a favorite transitional time for lovers of home décor. Shaking out the rugs and washing the windows after a long winter feels satisfying, and then there's the prospect of perhaps replacing some old, shabby furnishings with fresh new pieces.

Spring's also when we start to see the decor trends that will find their way home both figuratively and literally through summer and fall.

For 2015, these trends include a firm embrace of midcentury modern; emerging Art Deco; strong textures; organic modern (a blend of rustic and contemporary); and a color palette centered on sophisticated pastels.

Motifs from the Far East, Morocco and India remain strong, but now there are

more Greek and South American elements, including Hellenic patterns, blues paired with crisp whites, native motifs, and colorful, woven textiles and baskets.

Ikat and chevron, workhorse prints for the past few years, are being edged aside by medallion and tile patterns, bold preppy stripes and new twists on damask, geometrics, color block and watercolor prints. Kate Spade has collaborated on a new collection with West Elm, for instance, that includes chairs and bedding in fun, sophisticated graphics, florals and spatter prints.

The other news is that designers are mixing things up, so an antique bentwood chair can be paired with a glossy red desk, for instance, or a rustic flat-weave rug can sit in front of a 19th century marble man-

tel, or a farmhouse table can be placed under an ornate glass chandelier.

“Design pros have always known it's the combination of finishes that give a room style — it takes the sleek with the matte; textured with flat; and a mix of painted, wood, ceramic and metallic finishes for a room to look ‘done,’” says Elaine Griffin, a New York-based designer.

Now, thanks to home-design TV shows and social media, we're all becoming more knowledgeable decorators.

Mass-market retailers are not only offering more products that straddle styles, they're doing a better job of showing us how to use them. In-store displays and free design advice help shoppers envi-

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