

This year, give yourself an astro-accessory

SkyNews assistant editor Todd Carlson provides some timely gift ideas for the backyard astronomer

1. A **premium eyepiece** that offers comfortable eye relief and a wide, sharp field of view is probably the most coveted upgrade for the backyard astronomer. While top-of-the-line eyepieces cost hundreds of dollars, most observers think the expenditure is well worth it. For your first acquisition, try either a low-power wide-field eyepiece (26mm to 40mm) or a medium-to-high-power unit (5mm to 10mm). These tend to be used most often. Price: \$120–\$600 (varies depending on brand, design and size)



2. Some backyard astronomers never become completely comfortable aiming a finderscope at celestial targets. A **zero-power finder**, such as a Telrad or red-dot finder, doesn't magnify the view but projects a red circle or dot onto the black backdrop of the night sky. *Tip:* When using, keep both eyes open, one to view through the finder and the other to view the sky. Price: \$25–\$50



3. Sitting down while observing allows you to relax, which can potentially increase visible details. A commercially made **observing chair** can be purchased from most telescope dealers, but some observers design their own or modify stools meant for home use.



Price: Stool shown, about \$20; adjustable-height observing chairs, up to \$300



4. Using **red light** around a telescope at night is essential to maintain dark-adapted eyes. A small battery-powered camping lamp with a shade and replacement red bulb, available at hardware stores, creates enough light to read charts while still preserving night vision. Price: Under \$20

5. Cold Canadian winters are a fact of life. Since gloves are often removed to handle eyepieces, filters and flashlights, fingers suffer the most. **Warm gloves** that allow ample finger dexterity can be difficult to find. The North Face Pamir gloves with articulated fingers are the best I've discovered so far. Available at outdoor-clothing specialty stores. Price: \$75



6. Fitted with foam, an **eyepiece case** is a worthwhile investment to protect your valuable accessories. Available in plastic or metal at most telescope dealers; sizes vary as necessary. Price: \$40 and up



7. Accurate collimation of a reflector telescope's optics is critical for the sharpest views possible. A **laser collimator** that slips into the eyepiece drawtube eases the process. Canadian astro-equipment innovator Jim Kendrick of Kendrick Astro Systems has created models for truss-tube and solid-tube Newtonians in both 1.25- and 2-inch formats. Price: \$165 and up



8. A **telescope solar filter** will allow you to safely observe sunspots and other solar events, such as transits and eclipses, during daylight hours. Available in over-coated glass sized to fit various telescope apertures, in flexible Mylar with metal or plastic collars fitted for specific telescope apertures and in a Mylar sheet, as shown, that can be cut to fit into a homemade mounting cell. Caution: Never view the Sun through a telescope, binoculars or a finderscope without a proper solar filter. Price: Glass, \$90 and up; Mylar film, \$30 and up

9. Dew on optics is the nemesis of backyard astronomers. Powered by a 12-volt battery, the Kendrick **Dew Remover** has long been the standard for preventing moisture from forming on eyepieces, objective and corrector lenses and even laptop screens. Price: Controller, about \$120; heater strips, \$62 and up (varies depending on size) ■



Todd Carlson is an amateur astronomer living in Burk's Falls, Ontario. He's leaving extra cookies and milk for Santa this year.