

About the Moon Tree and Celestial Summer at Madison Square Park

This summer, Madison Square Park Conservancy (MSPC) debuts its Moon Tree, an American Sweetgum grown from a seed that orbited the moon and was gifted to the park by NASA last year through its Artemis Program. MSPC was selected from over one thousand applicants to receive a Moon Tree seedling—a distinctive honor for the borough's only certified arboretum. Part of a national conservation education initiative, the tree inspires parkgoers to explore connections between space, science, and the environment.

In honor of its growing Moon Tree, MSPC presents Celestial Summer, a horticulture celebration that includes thematic annual plantings, a newly commissioned poem by New York State Poet Laureate Kimiko Hahn, and a day of space-inspired family programming on July 16—the anniversary of the launch of Apollo 11 in 1969, the first American spaceflight to land humans on the moon.

MSPC's Moon Tree

In 1971, NASA astronaut Stuart Roosa carried seeds from five tree species on the Apollo 14 mission. After returning to Earth, the seeds were germinated, and the resulting seedlings, known as Moon Trees, were distributed to schools, state capitals, national parks, NASA centers, and dignitaries around the world. Building on this legacy, in 2022, NASA's Artemis Program sent a new generation of Moon Tree seeds into space, where they orbited the moon for four weeks aboard the Orion spacecraft. When they returned to Earth, Forest Service scientists studied, germinated, and grew the seedlings before they were distributed to a select number of applicants.

MSPC's American Sweetgum Moon Tree is located in the Farragut Lawn on the north end of the park, where it was planted in April 2025. The species is known for its distinctive star-shaped leaves, vibrant fall colors, and adaptability to various climates. Though the American Sweetgum is not native to Manhattan, the tree extends the park's resiliency in a changing climate, as it is adapted to handle warming temperatures.

Celestial Gardens

July – October 2026

Each year, MSPC creates a special horticulture installation, planting around 10,000 annuals tied to a specific theme. This year's display, *Celestial Gardens*, takes its theme from the Moon Tree and the recent Artemis II lunar mission. *Celestial Gardens* features plants with shapes, colors, names, and other attributes that evoke space and celestial bodies, including evening and night-blooming flowers (e.g. Four O'Clocks and Moonflowers), orb-shaped flowers (e.g. Billy Buttons), plants with thematically relevant names (e.g. Cosmos), and plants with the palettes and patterns of dawn, dusk, the sun, night, and the stars. The exhibition includes an aquatic garden in the park's Reflecting Pool, which will house both day- and night-blooming water lilies, as well as aquatic plants native to New York.

A new poem about the Moon Tree's journey by New York State Poet Laureate Kimiko Hahn debuts as part of the *Celestial Gardens*, marking MSPC's first commission in the medium.

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Additional themed poems by Humberto Ak'abal, Catherine Barnett, Sandra Lim, Campbell McGrath, and Kevin Young are installed throughout the plantings, curated and presented in partnership with the Poetry Society of America.

Moon Tree Launch Party

July 16, 2026, 12:00 PM – 8:00 PM

MSPC celebrates more than one year of terrestrial growth for its Moon Tree sapling with a day of engaging celestial-themed, family-oriented programming. Reflecting the park's multifaceted work in public art, community engagement, and horticulture, this event features interactive activities and presentations that engage the public with the arts and sciences.

The event kicks off with solar viewings led by researchers and staff from the Simons Foundation, allowing visitors to safely examine the sun with telescopes fitted with solar filters and special solar binoculars. Visitors are also invited to "listen" to the sun through LightSound devices, which convert light into sound for a unique, accessible sensory experience. Throughout the late afternoon and into the evening, visitors can enjoy poetry readings by Kimiko Hahn, talks and tours by MSPC staff about the Moon Tree and Celestial Gardens, scavenger hunts and artmaking activities, and two "Ask a Scientist" sessions featuring researchers from the Simons Foundation in conversation about other worlds, science fiction, and how astronomical images and data can be translated into sound. The celebration also includes a gallery of community-contributed Moon Tree artwork, presented in partnership with NPR's Radiolab.

More details, including a full schedule of events, will be available at madisonsquarepark.org/community/calendar/

This program is supported by Simons Foundation International and administered by Simons Foundation's Science, Society & Culture division.

About Madison Square Park Conservancy

Madison Square Park Conservancy (MSPC) is the nonprofit entrusted by the City of New York to conserve, maintain, and program Madison Square Park, a dynamic 6.2-acre public park in the heart of Manhattan. Through its public art commissions, horticultural stewardship, and engaging programming, MSPC cultivates an urban oasis that welcomes a diverse community of over 60,000 visitors every day. MSPC has led the park to national and international distinction, including its accreditation as a Level 2 arboretum—the only arboretum in Manhattan—as well as its selection as the first public art organization to commission the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019. Responsible for raising 100% of the park's operating budget, MSPC ensures that this evolving greenspace continues to be a haven for neighbors, visitors, and artists for generations to come. For more information, visit madisonsquarepark.org.

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About Simons Foundation International

The Simons Foundation's mission is to advance the frontiers of research in mathematics and the basic sciences. Since its founding in 1994 by Jim and Marilyn Simons, the foundation has been a champion of basic science through grant funding, support for research and public engagement. We believe in asking big questions and providing sustained support to researchers working to unravel the mysteries of the universe.

Simons Foundation International (SFI) is a philanthropy whose mission is to advance the frontiers of research in mathematics and the basic sciences.

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