

White House Rose Garden In The News

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The White House Rose Garden, currently making news as the site of an event that spread COVID-19, was renovated this summer with a new limestone walkway, better drainage, and removal of ten crabapple trees.

The White House Rose Garden is getting more than its share of press lately. As President Trump battles COVID-19, a Rose Garden event announcing Judge Amy Coney Barrett as the President's Supreme Court nominee is receiving scrutiny as a source of the virus's spread. According to various news reports, seven attendees of the event have tested positive including President Trump, first lady Melania Trump, White House adviser Hope Hicks, former NJ Governor Chris Christie, Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), former advisor Kellyanne Conway, and Notre Dame President Reverend John I. Jenkins.

Though not nearly as serious, the Rose Garden was also in headlines this summer as it underwent a renovation. In late July, the first lady announced a significant renewal of the garden due to "decades of use and necessary changes made to support the modern presidency have taken a toll on the garden and have made it more difficult to appreciate the elegant symmetry." The final design plan was the result of a collaboration by two premier landscape architecture firms, Perry Guillot, Inc and Oehme, van Sweden & Associates/OvS. (The full [Rose Garden landscape report](#) is available for download.)

The West Garden has been called the Rose Garden since 1913 when Mrs. Ellen Wilson replaced the existing colonial garden with a formal rose garden. The current design is the work of Rachel Lambert "Bunny" Mellon and was installed in 1962 under the Kennedy Administration. Elements of the renovation included returning the Garden to its original '62 footprint, improving infrastructure, better drainage, and creating a healthier environment for plantings to reduce the risk of leaf blight. In addition, the plans included improved Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility, utilities, and support for audiovisual and broadcasting needs.

Unveiled in late August, the north and south parterres of the West Wing area, defined by boxwood, were reworked and filled with John F. Kennedy and Pope John Paul II white roses, as well as pink and cream Peace roses. (These specific varieties were meant to be "placeholders" according to *Architectural Digest*, since they are not ideal for the D.C. climate.) A new three foot wide limestone walking path also surrounds the central lawn.

Among the more controversial elements of the garden renovation was the removal of 10 crabapple trees. According to ["The Full Story Behind the Controversial Rose Garden Redesign"](#) in *Architectural Digest*, "...Mellon's original crab apples, a 1928 pale-pink variety called Katherine, disappeared for good in 2003, when, having grown too large, they were replaced with younger examples. Those were replaced in 2010 and again in 2019, when Katherine was superseded by Spring Snow, a Canadian white-flowering variety that dates to 1963. The latter trees, which didn't thrive, are reportedly being relocated elsewhere on the White House property." Another [article at justthenews.com](#) reports the trees were casting shade and growing roots to the detriment of other plantings.

The renovation was revealed just before the first lady's Republican convention speech was held in the Rose Garden. After the convention, the Rose

Garden lawn was re-sodded from damage incurred by the convention and paid for with campaign funds, according to reports from the Washington Post and ABC News.

The Rose Garden renovation plan went through the approval process of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House (CPWH) and aligned with the recommendations of their sub-committee, Committee for the Preservation of the White House Gardens (CPWHG). The project was supported by the National Park Service, who has cared for the White House and its grounds since 1933, and funded with private donations.

This fall, the White House will open its gardens and grounds, including the Rose Garden, to visitors. The grounds will be open on Saturday, October 17, 2020 from 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM, and Sunday, October 18, from 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM. This event is free and open to the public, however, a ticket is required for all attendees (including small children). The National Park Service (NPS) will distribute free, timed tickets near the public entrance at the corner of 15th Street and Constitution Avenue Northwest throughout each tour day. Tickets will be distributed every half hour—one ticket per person—on a first-come, first-served basis. To check the status of Garden Tours in the event of inclement weather, please call the 24-hour information line at (202) 456-7041.