

☆PREMIUM

Come rain, come shine, New Yorkers are here for free trees

April 23, 2025 Joanna Insko



NYRP's 2025 free tree giveaways. Photo courtesy of New York Restoration Project

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sustain urban

The logo for 'Sustain Urban' features the word 'sustain' in a dark blue, sans-serif font. The letter 'U' is a large, green, stylized shape that overlaps the 's' and 't'. Below the 'U' are three horizontal, wavy lines in a light blue color, resembling water. The word 'urban' is written in a green, sans-serif font, positioned below the 'U' and the wavy lines.

EAST FLATBUSH — On a rainy Saturday in April, over 100 tree saplings sat in the courtyard of Brooklyn Public Library’s Clarendon Branch for the New York Restoration Project’s (NYRP) sixth free tree distribution event of the season.

NYRP gives away 3,500 free trees citywide annually. This year, the distribution events have taken place every weekend from April 5 to May 4, with six based in Brooklyn.



NYRP's 2025 free tree giveaways. Photo courtesy of New York Restoration Project
On Saturday, April 12, the forecast was gloomy, but that didn't stop green-thumbed Brooklynites from making their way to East Flatbush. A few minutes after the event began at 10 a.m., a line began to form.

“With 99% of our events, if it's raining, we cancel or postpone because nobody will come out,” said NYRP's public programming coordinator Mike Horwitz. “With these, because the program is so well established and people really want their trees, people know that we've done these in the past — even in the rain — so they know we're gonna be here.”



NYRP's 2025 free tree giveaways. Photo courtesy of New York Restoration Project
New York State Nurses Association President and Staten Island resident Nancy Hagans came to Brooklyn for Saturday's giveaway in the hopes of taking home a [dogwood](#) tree — one of the several varieties available at the event. This was not her first time attending an NYRP tree giveaway.

“I’ve been coming since Bloomberg started giving them away,” said Hagans. “Where I live in Staten Island is a preservation area. So if you have a dead tree and move it, you have to plant another one to replace it, which is nice. I’ve always wanted to live in a preservation area where you protect the plants.”



Nancy Hagans surveys trees with the help of NYRP representative at the April 12 event. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insko

Laughing, Hagans added, “Don’t ask me about my water bill.”

A variety of tree species are available at NYRP’s giveaways. Horwitz said the most popular variety is the persimmon tree, followed by the plum, serviceberry, dogwood and hawthorn.



NYRP's Public Programming Coordinator Mike Horwitz assists a free tree recipient at the April 12 event. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insko

“Generally, people go the most for fruit trees, and then people go for flowering trees, and then for neither,” said Horwitz. “People in the city tend to want smaller trees. So, over the years, we adjusted the trees we give out to fit with what people want, but we still need to maintain species diversity. We meet people where they’re at, but we don’t just give out persimmons and 1,000 plums.”

NYRP has given away [over 75,000 free trees](#) since it launched its giveaway program in 2008 as part of the NYC Parks Department’s [MillionTreesNYC](#) initiative. The trees come from Octoraro Native Plant Nursery in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and are brought to NYC by NYRP for a variety of environmental and health reasons.



New Yorkers line up in the rain for NYRP's April 12 event. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insko
"NYRP distributes free trees because they are a vital part of the urban environment," said Horwitz. "Trees provide physical benefits, such as stormwater mitigation, reducing temperatures in the summer and reducing air pollution, but they also improve mental health."

For Hagans, the program provides her with an outlet for more than just aesthetic purposes.



Nancy Hagans selects a Washington Hawthorn tree at the April 12 NYRP event. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insko

“For me, planting is like therapy,” said Hagans. “I have a big space. I have a room where I have so many plants that I give some away. Because I have a skylight where they can get green light, I have my green room. It’s my therapy, I could plant all day. If I’m upset I start potting and planting and it takes away everything.”

Free tree recipients are not permitted to plant their trees in public parks or street tree pits, but those without private property can still participate. Brooklynites are welcome to take trees to their local libraries and schools or, if permitted, for planting in a shared apartment courtyard.



New Yorkers line up in the rain for NYRP's April 12 event. Brooklyn Eagle photo by Joanna Insko
“The trees are free because NYRP’s goal is to maximize participation with as few barriers as possible for as many people as possible, particularly people in low-income and underserved communities. These communities tend to have less canopy cover and fewer resources to improve the built environment,” said Horwitz.

In an NYRP press release, Councilmember Lincoln Restler (D-33) [said](#), “We are grateful that the New York Restoration Project is helping us fill more front yards, backyards, schoolyards and community gardens with beautiful new trees.”



NYRP's 2025 free tree giveaways. Photo courtesy of New York Restoration Project
The [remaining Brooklyn distribution locations](#) include the Wyckoff House Museum in Canarsie, Red Hook Farms and Green-Wood Cemetery. And for those who have already received trees, NYRP provides resources for upkeep with a [Tree Care Guide](#) and [Tree Mulching Guide](#) that detail steps for watering, pruning, planting and more.

“New York Restoration Project’s free tree giveaways are a great spring tradition in our city,” said NYRP Executive Director Lynn Bodnar Kelly. “This beloved program continues to spread the undeniable benefits of our urban tree canopy to the neighborhoods that need them most. Our city must get more trees in the ground if we want to truly increase New York’s environmental resilience.”



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