

## Stumbling upon Central Park's Remarkable Conservatory Garden

(By Toshio U.-P.)

On my first visit to New York City's Central Park in the early summer of 2025, I found myself walking north of the Reservoir toward Harlem, unsure what to expect of the upcoming Conservatory Garden. As I entered through the south entrance of the formal classical European garden-scape, I was greeted by some lush trees and shrubs providing some comfortable shade to a weary traveler eager to stay out of the scorching sun. After entering the formal English-style perennial garden, I made my way through the combination of rectilinear and curvilinear beds that enclosed a central lily pond with a fountain named after the author of "The Secret Garden", completed by a set of benches for quiet repose and reflection. Continuing my course northward, I arrived at the central Italian Renaissance garden with its grandiose and open rectilinear edges enclosing a large lawn flanked by allées of Crabapple on each side. To add a more circular contrasting focal point, the west end of the lawn is paired with a central single-jet fountain, echoed by a lush semi-circular pergola just behind it to the west. After passing by the elegant wrought-iron Vanderbilt Gate on the eastern periphery, I found my way into the classical French portion of the formal European gardens, making me reminisce a little bit about the Jardins de Versailles by the circular concentric arrays of parterres beds enclosing a central fountain of "3 Dancing Maidens" by renowned German sculptor Walter Schott. After exiting the Conservatory Garden and continuing my course from the south end of Central Park to its apex, a feeling of awe and wonder lingered within me. After quickly reading about the garden, I soon learned that the park oasis dated back to the remarkable work of Landscape Architect Gilmore Clark and planting expert Betty M. Sprout, who first brought about the original plans of the 6-acre space back in the late 1930s, following the demolition of a large glass conservatory that previously rested on the site for over three decades. Another notable contributor in keeping the area both accessible and beautiful was the renowned garden and landscape designer Lynden Miller who revived the space in the early 1980s. The garden that was both inspiring and rejuvenating to me upon my recent first visit was also in part due to a recent restoration dating back to the end of the Pandemic through the Central Park Conservancy.

