

Special and Seasonal Events



The types of seasonal and special events change each year. Some events do reoccur annually, but details (such as date and time) change. This section provides an overview of the events offered in the past and planned for the near future, to give you a sense of all the exciting things occurring in Washington that you may be able to attend.

Capitol Events

February-April - Botanic Garden Orchid Exhibit

The U.S. Botanic Garden hosts the "Orchid Mystique" exhibit annually from mid-February to late April. It is a renowned showcase of thousands of orchids, and usually follows a theme. In 2012, to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the gift of the cherry trees, the orchids were arranged in settings evocative of Japanese gardens. The event also includes orchid-themed activities for adults and children.

Who Can Attend: Open to the public without tickets

Location: 100 Maryland Avenue SW on the west side of the U.S. Capitol

Hours: Every day from 10:00am-5:00pm

Contact: www.usbg.gov or (202) 225-8333

May - Memorial Day Concert

On the eve of Memorial Day, PBS hosts and broadcasts a Memorial Day Concert on the West Front of the Capitol. It is a multiple award-winning television event that has truly become an American tradition, honoring the military service and sacrifice of all our men and women in uniform, their families at home, and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. The program is hosted by a star-studded line-up and includes addresses by famous military leaders (Colin Powell in 2012), performances by big name bands and the National Symphony Orchestra, and appearances by well-known actors. PBS broadcasts the concert live to military bases in 175 countries and 140 U.S. Navy ships at sea.

Who Can Attend: Open to the public without tickets

Location: The West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol

Hours: Sunday before Memorial Day, 8:00-9:30pm in 2012. General Admission gates opened at 5:00pm in 2012.

Contact: <http://www.pbs.org/memorialdayconcert/concert/>

June-August - West Front Military Band Concerts

The practice of holding military band concerts on the Capitol grounds dates back at least to 1863, when the United States Marine Corps band held concerts on the west side of the Capitol and a space was provided for children who wished to dance. By some point before 1927 both the Marine Corps and Navy bands had performed concerts at the Capitol; in that year, Architect of the Capitol David Lynn requested that the Army band play one night a week during the summer because the other two bands were already scheduled for the season. In 1946 the Air Force band was added to the series.

Who Can Attend: Open to the public without tickets

Location: West Steps of the U.S. Capitol

Hours: Monday-Friday at 8:00pm, weather permitting

In 2012, the Navy Band performs on Mondays, the Air Force Band performs on Tuesdays and select Thursdays, the Marine Corps Band performs on Wednesdays, and the Army Band performs on Thursdays.

Contact: <http://www.aoc.gov/aoc/press-room/2012-Summer-Concert-Series.cfm>

July - A Capitol 4th: America's Independence Day Celebration

PBS hosts America's favorite Independence Day tradition on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol. The event features performances from some of the country's best-known musical names topped off by the greatest display of fireworks anywhere in the nation. The concert often includes the National Symphony Orchestra and live cannon fire provided by the United States Army Presidential Salute Battery, an audience favorite and now a Capitol Fourth tradition.

Who Can Attend: Open to the public without tickets (but the Mall becomes extremely crowded, so encourage constituents to arrive early to clear security checkpoints).

Location: The West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol (Smithsonian Metro station closed until after the ceremony ends)

Hours: 8:00-9:00pm on July 4th. Public access to the National Mall begins at 10:00am, with all visitors required to enter via security checkpoints. General Admission gates to the West Lawn will open at 3:00pm.

Contact: <http://www.pbs.org/capitolfourth/concert.html>

September - Constitution Week

Constitution Week is an observance to commemorate the adoption of the U.S. Constitution and runs annually from September 17-23. President George W. Bush officially declared the inception of the first Constitution Week in September 2002. The purpose of the week is to promote the study and education of the constitution.

The Exhibition Hall of the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) hosts "What's in the Constitution?" Tours occur daily, except Sunday, at 10:00am, 11:00am, 2:00pm, and 3:00pm. Through stories and object exploration learn how the Constitution delineates the powers of Congress, the legislative branch of our federal government. Tours are 20 minutes long. Meet at the entrance to Exhibition Hall on the lower level of the CVC. No reservations or passes required.

Monday through Friday of Constitution Week features daily talks by experts from the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and the Capitol Visitor Center. They use documents on display in Exhibition Hall to explain how the Constitution protects American freedoms. Talks last 15 minutes. Meet at the entrance to Exhibition Hall on the lower level. No reservations or passes required.

Many other events occur at the CVC throughout the week. See

http://www.visitthecapitol.gov/Education/constitution_Week.html for more information.

November-December - Botanic Garden Season Greenings

During the holiday season, the U.S. Botanic Garden presents a unique exhibit featuring model trains, incredible replicas of Washington, DC's most famous buildings and monuments, and holiday flora.

Who Can Attend: Open to the public without tickets

Location: 100 Maryland Avenue SW on the west side of the U.S. Capitol

Hours: The exhibit runs from late November (after Thanksgiving) until shortly after New Year's Day. Open 10:00am-8:00pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays in December (with concerts from 6:00-8:00pm), and all other days from 10:00am-5:00pm.

Contact: www.usbg.gov or 202-225-8333

December - Capitol Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

The lighting of the Christmas Tree has been a tradition at the U.S. Capitol since 1964. In early December each year, lights on the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree are lit during a ceremony held at the Capitol. In 2011 Speaker John Boehner lit the tree. The tree is decorated with thousands of lights and ornaments that reflect the chosen theme or the tree's state of origin. The event features holiday music by several performers.

Who Can Attend: Open to the public without tickets

Location: The West Front of the U.S. Capitol (security checkpoints at First Street and Maryland Avenue SW, and First Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW)

Hours: Date and time to be determined.

Contact: <http://www.aoc.gov/aoc/press-room/Christmas-Tree-Lighting-Ceremony-2011.cfm>

National Mall Events

The National Park Service hosts numerous events each month at various sites on or around the National Mall. A full list of events for the upcoming month can be found at

<http://www.nps.gov/nama/planyourvisit/events.htm>. Below are examples of events for the month of June. Check monthly for updated events information.

Summer Concert Series at the World War II Memorial

The Navy Band Commodores perform at the World War II memorial on summer Fridays from 6:00pm-7:30pm. The event is free and cancelled in the event of rain. Chairs are provided.

Art at the Park

The National Mall exhibits the works of local and national artists at the Lincoln Memorial on select days in the summer.

May-August-Jazz in the Garden

The National Gallery of Art hosts the Jazz in the Garden Series every summer. The concert series features an array of jazz artists performing a wide variety of styles, including salsa, blues, vibraphone, and Afrofunk. Guests may purchase food and beverages from the Pavilion Café and its carts located around the Garden or bring their own picnics. Alcoholic beverages may not be brought to the premises from outside and are subject to confiscation. Security officers reserve the right to inspect all items brought into the Sculpture Garden. For the safety of visitors and works of art, access to the Sculpture Garden will be limited if the space becomes too crowded. Concerts may be cancelled due to excessive heat or inclement weather.

Who Can Attend: Free and open to the public without tickets

Location: The National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden near the National Mall

Hours: Every Friday evening from 5:00-8:30pm, from late May until the end of August

Contact: <http://www.nga.gov/programs/jazz/> and (202) 289-3360

White House Events

December - Holiday Tour

At this event, 85,000 guests get the opportunity to see the 37 White House Christmas trees, which are usually decorated to fit the theme of the White House holidays, view the gingerbread house, and enjoy holiday music. You can view more information at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/holidays>.

December - National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony

The National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony is free and open to the public and is held on the Ellipse of President's Park, usually in the first few days of December. The event features appearances by the First Family as well as well-known performers and bands. Tickets are available through an online lottery system, open for a few days in early November. To enter the lottery, visit www.thenationaltree.org, and follow the link to the online ticket lottery application page.