

Flown Flora: NASA's Moon Trees and Public Memory

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Introduction

In 1976 various cities, institutions, and museums across the nation planted saplings, called “moon trees.” Before germination, these trees went to space as seeds with astronaut Stuart Roosa in his Personal Preference Kit. Once planted, these trees became sites of public memory— once forgotten, then remembered.¹ Our research seeks to place the moon tree project in the context of other NASA public relations initiatives.



Stuart Roosa holding the tin that carried the tree seedlings. From: Forest History Society¹



Left: “Moon Tree” Planting Leaflet
Right: “Moon Tree” Growing Kit
From: Forest History Society¹

Description

Public excitement during the bicentennial encouraged positive reactions towards the moon tree plantings. Afterwards the majority of the public forgot their existence due to poor recording of the trees’ locations. However, the re-discovery of the trees in the late 1990s,² and the trees’ role in the recent NASA Artemis mission stimulated public excitement again.³

References

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Key Findings

- Grew into a NASA public relations initiative to combat decline of public support for the space program in the 1970s.⁴
- More non-STEM interest in the moon trees than expected.
- Large presence of newspaper/magazine articles highlights public interest.
- Moon trees reached primarily a student-based audience.



“Moon Tree Planting” in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
From: Forest History Society¹