



REFERENCE • VISITORS

Visitor Report

How many people would visit Boulder Botanical Gardens, where they would come from, and how the estimate holds up against Boulder's visitor market.

Summary

Boulder Botanical Gardens can expect about **250,000 visits a year** from its core visitors once fully built, rising to about 275,000 with CU families, Folsom Field concertgoers and Sundance attendees. The full range runs from 200,000 to about 337,000. About 64% would come from Colorado residents and 36% from out of state. The review in this report finds that range realistic and, on the tourist side, slightly conservative.

- **The market is large.** Boulder draws roughly 3.3 million visitor-days a year, more than 1.2 million visitors downtown, and about \$1 billion a year in visitor spending in Boulder County.
- **The garden needs only a small share of it.** The base case asks the garden to capture about 4% of Boulder's visitor-days, and about one visit a year for every three county residents.
- **The weak spot is the data, not the demand.** Boulder's best visitor counts are several years old or seasonal. A visitor survey in the feasibility study should replace these estimates.

Three groups add upside: CU families, Folsom Field concertgoers and Sundance attendees could add roughly 12,000 to 37,000 garden visits a year, mostly outside the summer peak, lifting the base case to about 275,000.

Boulder's visitor market

Boulder already draws millions of visits a year, but no single figure counts individual tourists. Each measure below counts something different, so they should not be added together.

MEASURE	FIGURE	WHAT IT COUNTS	SOURCE
Visitor-days in Boulder	About 3.3 million a year	One person spending one day; undated, published around 2017	Visit Boulder
Visitor-nights in the city	2,820,827 (2013)	Overnight stays plus day trips	Boulder CVB, 2013
Of those, day visitors	1,021,139 (2013)	Same-day trips	Same study
Individual hotel guests	327,216 (2013)	Unique people in hotels	Same study
Downtown visitors	More than 1.2 million a year	Visitors to downtown	Visit Boulder
Boulder County Parks & Open Space	1,828,734 visits (2024)	County-managed properties only; a minimum estimate	Boulder County, 2024
City of Boulder Open Space & Mountain Parks	6,168,492 visits a year (2021–2023)	City-managed trails and open space	City of Boulder
Visitor spending, Boulder County	\$999.4 million (2022)	All travel spending	Colorado OEDIT, Dean Runyan
Tourism jobs, Boulder County	6,270 (2022)	Jobs supported by travel	Same report
Population, Boulder County	328,560 (2025)	Residents	U.S. Census

Who visits downtown

The 2024 Downtown Intercept Survey interviewed 775 visitors from July through September 2024.

- **41% came from outside Colorado.** That is the survey's key finding; its text also says "nearly half," so 41% is the safer figure to cite.
- **California, Texas and Illinois** are named as large sources of out-of-state visitors. The survey does not rank states or give percentages.
- **Just over half of the Colorado respondents lived in Boulder**, up from 43% in 2018.
- **60% were in town for leisure**, a vacation or visiting family and friends. About 1 in 10 were visiting CU Boulder.
- **Out-of-state visitors spend nearly double per visit** what local residents spend.

Checking the figures

1. **Visitor-days are not visitors.** The 3.3 million figure counts days, so one visitor staying three days counts three times. It is also undated.
2. **The 1.8 million open space visits are county properties only.** City of Boulder open space adds about 6.2 million more. Both count visits, mostly by residents, not tourists.

3. **The 41% out-of-state share is a summer, downtown snapshot.** It likely overstates the out-of-state share for the year as a whole and for places away from Pearl Street.

Expected visitors to the gardens

Once fully built, the gardens should draw 200,000 to 300,000 visits a year from core visitors, with a base case of 250,000. Counting CU families, Folsom Field concertgoers and Sundance attendees (below), the base case rises to about 275,000.

VISITOR GROUP	LOW	BASE	HIGH
Boulder County residents	90,000 (45%)	105,000 (42%)	120,000 (40%)
Rest of Colorado, mostly Denver-metro day trips	50,000 (25%)	55,000 (22%)	60,000 (20%)
Out-of-state and international	60,000 (30%)	90,000 (36%)	120,000 (40%)
Total core visits a year	200,000	250,000	300,000
Including CU families, Folsom Field and Sundance	About 212,000	About 275,000	About 337,000

- **Opening years.** With only the gardens, lawn and stage open, expect 120,000 to 180,000 visits. The total rises once the Main Building, Conservatory and Super Bloom open and draw winter visitors and events.
- **Events are included.** The totals include about 60,000 visits for a winter Festival of Lights and a six-show summer concert series (below).
- **Paid versus total.** The business plan assumes 120,000 paid admissions. The rest are members, free community days, school groups and event guests.

Summer concert series

A six-show summer series on the Live Music Lawn would bring roughly 12,000 to 18,000 visits a year, with the Flatirons behind the stage. Red Butte Garden's comparable amphitheater holds 3,000 guests per show.

	LOW	BASE	HIGH
Shows a summer	6	6	6
Guests per show (planning assumption)	2,000	2,500	3,000
Concert visits a year	12,000	15,000	18,000

- **Dates.** Book the series around Folsom Field's stadium shows so the two draw separate crowds.
- **Growth.** Red Butte grew from four local bands in 1987 to about 30 shows a summer; six is a starting point toward the business plan's 10 to 14 shows a summer.

How the totals were built

- **Comparable gardens.** Olbrich in Madison drew 372,314 visits in its 2025 study, Red Butte draws more than 250,000, Zilker more than 125,000 and Gardens on Spring Creek about 70,000. A downtown, canyon-mouth site near Pearl Street places Boulder between Spring Creek and Olbrich.
- **Local share.** About 65% of Olbrich's visitors are local, and roughly three quarters of Coastal Maine's come from in-state. Boulder's mix is set lower because of its tourist traffic.
- **Tourist share.** The base case uses 36% out-of-state, below the 41% downtown summer figure, to allow for winter months and the walk from Pearl Street.

Three groups worth counting separately

CU families, Folsom Field concertgoers and Sundance attendees are part of Boulder's visitor traffic but are not broken out in the base case. Together they could add roughly 12,000 to 37,000 garden visits a year, about 5% to 15% of the base case. With them, the base case rises to about 275,000 visits a year, and the high case to about 337,000.

CU Boulder families

CU Boulder enrolls 38,510 degree-seeking students this fall.

GROUP	FALL 2026	WHO VISITS
Out-of-state undergraduates	13,592	Families flying or driving in, often for several days
In-state undergraduates	19,045	Families on day trips or short stays
New first-year students	7,438	Move-in each August, often a family's first trip to Boulder

Families also come for Family Weekend each fall, for commencement each May (open to guests without tickets), and with prospective students touring campus all year. About 1 in 10 downtown visitors in 2024 were in town to visit CU.

- **Estimate (planning assumptions, not measured):** about 13,592 out-of-state students × 1.5 family trips × 2 visitors gives roughly 40,000 visitor-trips; if 10–20% include the garden, that is 4,000 to 8,000 visits. In-state families add roughly 2,000 to 4,000, and prospective students more. Total: roughly **5,000 to 15,000 visits a year**.
- **Timing.** Move-in, Family Weekend and commencement fall in August, autumn and May, outside the summer peak.

Folsom Field concerts

Folsom Field holds about 50,000 people per show, and CU has hosted several stadium concerts a year since 2023.

YEAR	SHOWS	ATTENDANCE
2026	Mumford & Sons; Tyler Childers with Jon Batiste; Rüfüs Du Sol	Scheduled
2025	Phish (3 nights); John Summit	About 120,000 tickets on sale for Phish
2024	Odesza; Tyler Childers	Not published
2023	Dead & Company (3 nights)	131,450 tickets sold

- **Scale.** A big year brings roughly 100,000 to 150,000 concert tickets. Many fans attend several nights, so individual people are fewer.
- **Out-of-town fans.** During Phish, CU said Boulder hotels were "all at maximum capacity." Multi-night fans have free days, and the Creek Path links campus to the garden.
- **Estimate (planning assumption):** if 3–7% of concertgoers visit the garden during their stay, that is roughly **3,000 to 7,000 visits a year**.
- **Scheduling.** The garden's own concert lawn should book around Folsom Field dates rather than compete with them.

Sundance Film Festival

Sundance has drawn about 86,000 to 125,000 in-person attendees a year over the past decade, about one-third from out of state. It runs 11 days each January, starting January 21, 2027.

	LOW	HIGH
Festival attendees	86,000	125,000
Out-of-state share (about one-third)	About 29,000	About 42,000
Share of all attendees who visit the garden (planning assumption)	5%	12%
Garden visits during the festival	About 4,000	About 15,000

- **That is 400 to 1,400 visits a day** over 11 days, concentrated in the warm buildings: the Conservatory, Main Building and Greenhouse Dome.
- **It depends on the build sequence.** The 2027 festival comes years before the garden opens. Festival visits count only once the Conservatory and Main Building open, in Phases 2 and 3, and only if the festival is still in Boulder then.
- **Extend the Festival of Lights through Sundance.** Running it to the end of January turns the garden into an evening destination for festival crowds.
- **Super Bloom as a festival venue.** Sponsor receptions, panels and parties during the festival would add premium rental nights on top of the 80-event plan.

Why this matters for the market size

Folsom Field concerts resumed only in 2016, after a 15-year hiatus. The 2013 city visitor study predates them, so Boulder's published visitor totals likely understate today's market.

Review of the projection

Visitor demand supports the 250,000 base case, and the groups counted separately lift it to about 275,000. Every demand check below lands in a modest range.

Demand checks: the range holds

CHECK	LOW	BASE	HIGH	VERDICT
Non-county visits as a share of Boulder's 3.3 million visitor-days	3.3%	4.4%	5.5%	Modest for a major attraction near downtown
Total visits compared with downtown's 1.2 million visitors	17%	21%	25%	Plausible for a walkable second destination
County visits per county resident a year	0.27	0.32	0.37	Modest; residents already make millions of open space visits
Out-of-state share of visits	30%	36%	40%	At or below the 41% downtown summer figure

Site planning

Visitor demand, not acreage, should set the target. The 7.8-acre site would be well used, like other compact urban gardens, and busy days are a design question for the feasibility study: timed entry on peak days, the Creek Path entrance, shared parking at the Justice Center and library lots, and events spread across the seasons.

What would move the number

- **Festival of Lights (biggest upside).** The plan assumes 60,000. Denver Botanic Gardens' Blossoms of Light drew more than 195,000. A strong winter festival could push the total past 300,000.
- **Sundance (a winter boost).** With 86,000 to 125,000 attendees a year, the festival could add about 4,000 to 15,000 garden visits in late January, once the Conservatory and Main Building are open.
- **Parking and peak days (to plan for).** Busy summer weekends and concert nights will need the most planning. Timed entry, the Creek Path entrance and shared lots at the Justice Center and library would carry the load.
- **Opening sequence.** Until the Conservatory and Super Bloom open, winter visits stay low and the total sits near the opening-years range.

Recommendation

Plan for about 275,000 visits a year: a 250,000 core base case plus CU families, Folsom Field concertgoers and Sundance attendees. Design the site, parking and event calendar to welcome those numbers, with timed entry on peak days and events spread across all four seasons.

Data gaps and next steps

The projection rests on comparables and older city data; four steps would make it solid.

- Ask Visit Boulder for its current visitor-days, unique-visitor estimate and seasonal mix; the published figures date from 2013 to about 2017.
- Add a garden question to the next Downtown Intercept Survey, and run it in winter as well as summer.
- Commission a visitor and market study in the feasibility study, for example with CU's Leeds Business Research Division.
- Plan peak-day parking, transit and timed entry so the site can welcome the projected visitors.

Sources

1. Visit Boulder: travel guide and visitor figures (travelboulder.com)
2. Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau: 2013 Economic Impact of Tourism
3. Boulder County Parks & Open Space: Annual Visitation Report 2024
4. City of Boulder: Open Space visitation estimate, 2021–2023
5. Downtown Boulder Partnership: 2024 Downtown Intercept Survey; ColoradoBiz coverage
6. Colorado OEDIT: Dean Runyan, Economic Impact of Travel, 2022
7. U.S. Census: Boulder County QuickFacts, 2025
8. University of Colorado: Fall 2026 enrollment; CU Boulder Today, Commencement 2026 and Family Weekend
9. Folsom Field (Wikipedia); Axios Boulder and Denver7 on Phish, 2025; Denver7, first Folsom Field concert in 15 years
10. Visit Boulder: Sundance information for businesses
11. Olbrich economic study, 2025; APGA and University of Utah on Red Butte; ABC4 on Red Butte concerts; City of Austin on Zilker; Wikipedia on Gardens on Spring Creek; MaineBiz on Coastal Maine; Denver Botanic Gardens 2023 Annual Report
12. Boulder Botanical Gardens Business Plan, October 2026 (planning assumptions)