

RCCG NEWS

April 2026 RCCG Newsletter

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2026 Important Dates

Saturday, April 11

Spring Clean-up

May 1

Garden must be started

Sunday, May 3

First Inspection (More Inspection Dates & Rules on pages 10 & 11)

Saturday, May 16

Plant Swap Day



President's Message

2025 Garden Season All Stars

Every year we honor our outstanding volunteers with in-person recognition during the spring meeting and in our newsletter. These gardeners represent the ideal of volunteerism in the garden and we thank them with a small gift as well as this recognition. Volunteers make the garden run and we want to honor them and honor their service that makes the garden work. Thanks again to these individuals and to all who volunteer for the garden.

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Judith Reiter: For the last several years Judy coordinated and been the main proponent of garden gatherings and especially the fall garden potluck. These events are great garden community events where fellow gardeners sample each other's delicious and often innovative dishes. She also had been a long time tender and leader in the herb and flower garden.

Chris Meyerhoff: Chris has been a help to the garden on the water team which did a fantastic amount of work last year as well is supporting the herb and flower garden.

Lauren Ackil: Lauren supports the herb and flower garden as well creating the garden What's App group.

Jo Russo: Jo tirelessly and painstakingly removed dreaded wiregrass around edges of the garden. Wiregrass is one of our dreaded invasives and very time intensive to remove once it's established.

Katherine Lenard: Supported weeding garden paths and plots to remove pernicious weeds.

Juliet Marrkand: Also supported the weed warriors by spending hours removing pernicious weeds in the garden.

Sean Alcorn: Was a great help doing tasks during the fall clean up.

Thys Van Schaik: Was fantastic doing many tasks during clean up days and also assisted the water team in remediating and improving the water system.

Jack Nelson: Tireless work as treasurer, garden neighborhood watch finding and fixing problems with trash, unsecured sheds and tools, or the water system almost as soon as they occurred. Also redoing garden plot signage and working on the fencing team.

Frank Carlman: Led the water team through very tough year attending to minor repairs, water startup, shutdown, major upgrades and emergency repairs which kept the garden water flowing.

Seven new gardeners join our Rock Creek Garden Community this Spring 2026:

Elisa Angeletti (E-10-B),
Darren Fleischer (D-4-B),
Michael Gehman (E-2-B),
Matt McFarland (C-6-A),
Tiernan Mennen (E-9-A),
Maria and Eugenio Vasquez (G-5-B)
Ivan Waldman (AA-7-A).

Welcome!

EXEMPLAR GARDENS

Additionally this year we also are giving a shout out to great gardeners and plots well done. Keep up the great work!

Amanda Buckley, Pam Ross, Pat Darish (and David Binkely), Amanda McBride, Kathleen Campbell (and Dawn Stallard), Janet Ranganathan, Beth Van Hanswyck, and Lena Heron.

Garden Managers Notes

Welcome to the 2026 gardening season. Given the mood and the atmosphere in our fine city, the garden is certainly a place of refuge, a place to stick your hands in the dirt and take comfort from things we can't control. Only to not be in control (ME!!!) with what seeds germinate. Will the tomatoes yield a good crop this year? How do I make my beets grow better? Too much sun? Not enough sun? Too much water? Not enough water? I just don't know how farmers do it. Thank goodness I don't rely 100% on the garden for my food, and there's still take-out available.

The garden enters 2026 in good shape. We've got a goodly chip pile going and more on order courtesy of our garden partner, the NPS. After all of last year's travails, the water system should be in decent shape,

thanks to the water crew. The mowing crew is already keeping an eye on the grass, and when it will be a good time to mow. Even the wheelbarrows got fixed right quick with fabulous volunteer support. We've got tools, so we just need to make the time to get to work.

The first group event is coming up in a couple of weeks, on 11 April. For the newbies, amendment deliveries from vendors mostly come in on Friday, under Susan's sharp eye. Then we need a load of volunteers on Saturday to share their strong backs, or not so strong--so fewer trips, to distribute the amendments throughout the garden. This is the reason we have so many wheelbarrows. For this one day! There will be other large and small tasks for folks; hose distribution, pergola "construction", some weeding, some painting, some signage checking, some cleaning, etc. Clean up day isn't just for your plot, but for the community. I've even got a small fencing project.

Speaking of fencing, if you have issues, you'll have to let me know and we'll see. The crew is only responsible to assist with quadrant fencing. That's the fencing along the paths, not interior quadrant fencing between plots. Bottom boards to keep critters out of your plot are your financial responsibility. New gates are still at the low low price of \$35, plus volunteer labor from the carpenters and you to set the gate properly. Some of the fencing is from 1998ish (since before I got to the garden), so it's long in the tooth, but if it works, we aren't gonna mess with it. We've been putting in new and fresh only as we need to repair, replace.

As the season goes on, you can check in with me at the email: rockcreekgarden@gmail.com, as I check it pretty much every day, even whilst away on travels. I've a couple of back ups in the garden to help with issues. Thank you to all those who are stepping up to assist in the garden with inspections, with the communal flower/herb garden, mowing, fencing, weeding, carpentry, odd-jobs (like making sure tillers work!). You are all very much appreciated.

Regards, Rima

Cultivating your Heart Garden

By Laurie S. Jacobson

Something magical happens to me once the weather warms and the fresh smell of spring is in the air. My heart fills with wonder and anticipation, my spirit is lifted, and my mind automatically turns to the garden. Every year since my teens, I've been possessed by a compulsion to sink my fingers into the earth. My mission: to cultivate, plant, nurture, and watch flora mature, brighten, and beautify the landscape. This process never fails to brighten my soul as well.

I haven't chosen this compulsion. And I can't control it. My intense desire to plant is innate: originating from someplace deep inside me. I have no choice but to answer the call. To me, gardening is a labor of love—one that always gives back, either in the way of food, shade, or beauty.

Each March, my enthusiasm and my senses are heightened when I step outside, breathe the rich scent of spring, and inspect my garden beds. I smile as I uncover the first hardy green perennial shoots, still sleepy from their winter nap, poking up from the mulch. I delight at the sight of swollen buds on ornamental tree branches and shrubs. And I sigh at the sight of nipped rose and azalea branches where the deer have munched a snack.

The garden is one of my many teachers. Each season there's a lesson to be learned, or a message that sticks with me all year long. Sometimes I discover a new water plant. Other years I find the best fertilizer for an ailing rhododendron, or rejoice over the effectiveness of a natural pest deterrent. Sometimes the message is simply to slow down any be in the moment.

Last week, as I stuffed piles of decaying leaves and weeds into the wheelbarrow to be hauled away, the newly exposed earth of my vegetable bed seemed to ache for its yearly gift of lettuce seeds. Which variety would I plant first this year? I love them all: Black Seeded Simpson. Mesclun mix. Buttercrunch. Arugula.

Raised Beds and Their Discontents

By Joe Nelson

There is lots of conversation and enthusiasm about, as well as much activity from gardeners building raised beds. I wanted to talk about them as choices you can make but ensure you understand the main reasons why raised beds can be useful.

Why raised beds?

Raised beds naturally:

- Improve drainage
- Reduce compaction (you don't walk on them)
- Allow controlled soil composition

This is most easy and cheaply achieved by just making mounds of dirt. You can just use the edges of the mounds as the “borders” and you are in business. A common misunderstanding about beds is the belief that you need a fancy set of boards or containment for them, you don't. The fixed borders are just to make things look neater and can actually make it harder to weed, till, or relocate the beds. The key for beds is how deep and, if need be, how amended the soil can be throughout the layers.

Alternatives to raised beds:

Double digging or No digging

(I only talk about double digging here as I have no experience with “no dig” methods.)

Double digging is a traditional soil preparation method from intensive gardening systems like French Intensive Gardening and later popularized by John Jeavons. It's all about creating deep, loose, highly aerated soil so roots can grow more easily and plants can access water and nutrients more efficiently.

What “double digging” actually means

Instead of loosening just the top layer of soil (like normal tilling), you work two layers deep—typically 18–24 inches.

Basic idea:

1. Remove the top layer of soil (about one shovel deep) and set it aside.
2. Loosen the next layer down with a fork (without bringing it to the surface).
3. Add compost or organic matter.
4. Move to the next section and repeat, filling the previous trench with the topsoil you just removed.

The result is:

- Deep root penetration
- Better drainage
- Improved soil structure over time

Why people do it

Double digging is often used in systems like Biointensive Agriculture because it can:

- Increase yields in small spaces
- Reduce watering needs (deep soil holds moisture better)
- Improve resilience in poor or compacted soil

Ok Great, so what is your advice?

I'm not calling this gospel by any means, I'm just going to tell you what I do. If it hasn't already occurred to you in reading this, double digging is a bit of a workout. So raised beds may turn out to be easier but the initial work for either is considerable. For my part I kind of do both, sort of a hybrid approach. I do use boards but I'm slightly handy and have my own power tools to assemble. My sides are 2x10" so initially I double dig underneath to extend the soil prep to about 20" or so. As Susan Davis has pointed out, our soil is really good in the garden so you don't need amendments but a little doesn't hurt every so often. I initially added compost and organic material (compost from my compost pile as it's ready and manure from the stables when it was available). I also added a little bit of sand for where I was planting carrots. Every few seasons I repeat a double digging process in one or two of my beds, getting a few inches below the bed line but not as deep as the initial bedless work. I do this with shovel and roto-tiller so as to not disrupt the earthworms too much in a way that full roto-tilling might. I'm not fully convinced this process isn't just exercise for me as I haven't really tracked whether the work results in a better yield. I also find that raised beds seem to dry out more quickly so one the watch items is that if you have raised beds you'll likely need to water more.

So is this the right way to garden?

Short answer, there is no one best way to garden and you want to find the way that works for you. Like the Dragon Scroll in Kung Fu Panda, there is no secret ingredient. There are many who say that not tilling at all or no dig gardening is the best way and just let nature do the work of preparing the soil. This may be true or less impactful to the environment. I haven't tried it and I'd love for someone to share their experiences using those. Please let us know your experiences and choices with soil preparation, raised beds, and gardening in general.

Poetry Corner- Haiku

April is named Poetry Month. This year I'm giving you the whole month as you begin digging in your plot to come up with a haiku or two (you know, 3 lines of 5-7-5 syllables as it is taught traditionally in English.) Maybe you have a gardening friend or a young person in your household who would be brave enough to contribute.

So, what is haiku? It is a brief poem capturing a moment of deep perception of nature or human nature, using the techniques of seasonal reference (kigo, meaning "season word") and a pause or juxtaposition (kire in Japanese, meaning "cut"); Japanese haiku often employ a kireji, or "cutting word"). A seasonal reference grounds the poem not only in very real and present time but in the grand sweep of each season's

metaphorical associations, as well as to other poems that use the same seasonal foundation. The juxtaposition of two parts of the poem creates a space (referred to as *ma* in Japanese), producing a momentary tension that the reader can resolve by intuiting the relationship of the two parts. You can compose haiku well by writing about things themselves rather than your reactions to those things or your interpretations of them.

These classical haiku about spring from two of my favorite poets Basho and Issa. I hope they will inspire some of you or if you have children or grandchildren to write your own in April about gardening, and we will print a selection in our May newsletter.

On sweet plum blossoms

The sun rises suddenly.

Look, a mountain path!

—Basho

Temple bells die out.

The fragrant blossoms remain.

A perfect evening

—Basho

Come on now, friend owl,

Change your facial expression.

This is the spring rain.”

—Issa

Pure simplicity

Marks the arrival of spring—

A pale yellow sky.

—Issa

At every doorway.

From the mud on wooden

clogs,

Spring begins anew.

—Issa

Featured Gardeners - Josephine Russo

By Susan Galbraith

Josephine or 'Jo' as her friends call her grew up in Southern Pines, New Jersey, in an Italian-American family, where fresh food reigns supreme.

"My grandmother always had the freshest ingredients to cook with, and my dear Uncle Frank, who lived next door, had a huge garden—a good half-acre, and it was stunning. You could just walk over and nip off a cucumber and eat it while you walked around. From them my love of gardening and fresh vegetables.

And when, as an adult, did you learn about RCCG?

Living in DC and working in the government, I would walk through Rock Creek Park, sometimes with my dog, and I saw these plots and was filled with envy. I wanted one! So as soon as I retired I signed up and waited the three years. Last year I was excited to get the plot.

Given where we are in the world right now, can you give me one word reason why you are an urban community gardener?

Sanity. It's the whole nurturing and cultivating plants to grow and producing something you get to enjoy. I often get to work with a young man who is like our third son. If there is any big, heavy stuff to do, he is right there beside me. I have a buddy gardener, and he is fun and funny. So gardening for me is at time of pure joy. And I joined the same time as Thys. What a lovely man! Everything about him is positive and well-intentioned and caring. And it shows up in his garden. And now he is Inspections co-lead. And I volunteer for it because I think it is so important. Otherwise, there would be complete mayhem. Just gentle reminders like, "Your garden would benefit from..."

Exactly. We all have different values and standards. What do they say, "One person's weeds are another person's ground cover or salad fixings!"

Or how we must be tolerant of black snakes and how they keep down mice, voles and bunnies.

What are you going to grow this year?

Last year I grew 5 big artichoke plants (purple Romagna from Italy) from seed. I am waiting to see what number come back. I also brought back from Italy, I have 2 trays of seedlings. I have string beans, squash, 8 different varieties of tomatoes – black cherry, brandywine, amerna orange, chocolate stripes, black krim, and Cherokee chocolate. I'd also do beets, swiss chard, broccoli-rabe. This year, I'm going to try purple cauliflower and purple beans and purple peppers.

Does your husband also like to garden?

No but he likes to eat. And he is perfectly content to sit in the shade to read to keep me company while I garden. And he is excited for me when I have something to pick.

Will you share an Italian recipe with us, one your husband loves?—

Oh, yes! There' one from my grandmother – stuffed artichokes, a labor of love, which she'd layer in a big pot and low simmer all day.



Lemon Balm: A Calming Herb Your Body and Mind will Love

By Angela Christophe

For many in D.C. these are stressful times. In 2025 I was laid off from an organization I helped establish and was committed to for 20 years. And sadly, several of my friends were laid off around the same time, all for no clear fault of their own. I happily took refuge in my faith and in my garden. Dreaming of what I'd plant, digging in the soil, nurturing what seemed to magically grow and harvesting the fruit of my labor was genuinely comforting and healing to me.

I took it a step further by considering what plants would help me most during a period of stress. I planted ginger, a root I have long added to my daily smoothie to lower my inflammation, and lemon balm. Lemon balm was new to me, but Google told me that it has a long history as a soothing herb for both body and mind. Beyond its bright fragrance, it is known for its gentle calming effects. It has been used to ease stress and anxiety, promote a sense of calm, partly by promoting the brain chemical GABA. Some small studies suggest it may improve mood and concentration. A cup of lemon balm tea at night can help you wind down and get to sleep without the grogginess of some sleep aids.

It has also traditionally been used to aid digestion, reducing gas and bloating, and as a skin balm for its antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties.

I was thrilled and felt a sense of accomplishment to harvest a large amount of ginger and lemon balm. I took comfort in my calming daily cup of lemon balm tea. I believe it genuinely reduced my anxiety. One lesson I learned the hard way is that lemon balm is a member of the mint family and as such it can grow very aggressively and should therefore be planted in a container. I'm sure I'll be digging up lemon balm roots for a while. But I will continue to benefit from the lovely citrus fragrance and the many benefits of lemon balm in the beauty of nature and in the peace of my garden.

Water Committee Report

The Water spigots in the garden are back on. The red spigot near the picnic table supplies water to the faucets for the lower plots. The blue spigot near the trail close to Oregon Ave supplies water to faucets for the upper plots. Hoses will be attached to the faucets on April 11 – Spring Garden Clean up day. There is now no hose at the red spigot. Its only function is to be on or off for the faucets connected to it. Please go easy on it so we have water all summer. Last fall the water team installed a new faucet near the wood chip pile for public and pet use.

Many thanks to Frank Carlman for his long service to the garden by improving and maintain the water system for many years. Frank has now turned over the lead to Duane Gelderloos, so if you see a leak or other water issue call him. drgelderi@gmail.com 703-3483-1733.

Recipe Corner

Italian Stuffed Artichokes

Ingredients:

3 big fresh artichokes

1.5 cups Italian seasoned breadcrumbs (Progresso Italian Style works fine, but if making your own from plain breadcrumbs, make sure to add fresh parsley, dried oregano and thyme, onion and garlic powder, and salt & pepper)

½ cup grated Pecorino or Parmigiano cheese

3 large garlic cloves, minced

4 tablespoons olive oil, plus some to drizzle over the tops of the artichokes

½ cup fresh parsley, finely chopped

Salt & pepper to taste

1.5 cups water or broth (chicken is fine)

½ cup dry white wine

1 lemon

Cooking Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

In a medium bowl, mix the seasoned breadcrumbs, cheese, olive oil, minced garlic, parsley, and salt and pepper.

Fill a large bowl with cold water and juice from a squeezed lemon. Set aside.

Prep the artichokes by cutting off the stem and roughly 1.5 inches from the top with a serrated knife. Take a scissor and cut off the tips of the remaining leaves. Using a spoon, dig out the fibrous, fuzzy center “choke” as best you can. As you finish each artichoke, submerge it in the large bowl filled with cold water and lemon juice. Peel and add the stems as well.

Grandma started stuffing the artichokes by pounding each one on the table topside down to open the leaves and make room for the breadcrumbs. I prefer to stretch and pull the leaves back to open gaps for the seasoned breadcrumbs.

Spoon the breadcrumbs into the gaps, sometimes pounding the artichoke bottom down on a surface to ensure the mixture settles deep between the leaves. Fill the artichoke’s center as well.

Remember the Inspection Rules

What your fellow gardeners look for during inspections:

Notice: a single notice is non-punitive; however ignoring it or receiving multiple notices can result in a citation. Notices are sent by email when one or more of the following problems is observed:

- Any breach in the fence or gate that could let small or large four-legged animals enter your garden and into your neighbors garden.
- Any threat to the integrity of the fencing (tools lying against, or vegetation growing up hanging on/over the fence).
- Moderate common weeds in your plot or on the perimeter public path(s) of your garden plot.
- Invasive weeds in plot or in the public path(s) bordering your garden plot.
- Public Path(s) bordering your garden plot have not been chipped.
- Evidence of pest activity (snakes, rabbits, rodents, bean beetles, wasps, etc.).
- Other problems: Inactivity or unattended gardens; unmanaged compost bins; standing water.

Citation: A citation indicates a serious violation of garden rules and can result in expulsion or loss of your garden plot. Citations are sent by email when one or more of the following problems is observed:

- Previous notice has been ignored.
- Garden is not started by the first inspection date, usually first Sunday in May (this year May 3).
- A major breach or failure in the gate or fencing.
- Extensive common weeds or invasive weeds (or weeds going to seed).
- Trees or large, woody ornamental, perennial shrubs.
- Inactivity or unattended gardens (including produce left to rot).

RCCG INSPECTIONS SCHEDULE 2026

Inspections generally occur on Sundays at 4pm. Time may be adjusted at the discretion of the inspection group for inclement weather.

May 3 ** First inspection; garden must be started**

May 17

May 31

June 14

June 28

July 12

July 26

Aug 9

Aug 23

Sept 6

Sept 20

Oct 4 **Final inspection**

Oct 17 Executive Committee walkthrough

Tips to prepare for an Inspection:

Fence and Gate

- Check for holes or tears in fencing. Repair damage or breaches.
- Check fencing (general and rabbit) connection to posts or gates. Fix dangling or swaying fencing. Staple bottom of fencing to baseboard. Keep excess fencing off common paths.
- Keep vegetation (weeds and garden plantings) off perimeter fence.
- Check and ensure your gate closes securely.

Chips

- Weed and Chip the public paths abutting your garden plot.

Common Weeds

- Remove common weeds on the public path (front and perimeter) of your garden, inside your garden plot, and your inside borderline to prevent spreading into your neighbors garden plot.

Invasive Weeds

- Remove invasive weeds on the public path (front and perimeter) of your garden, inside your garden plot, and your inside borderline to prevent spreading into your neighbors garden plot.

Pests

- Check plants and garden plot for pest activity. Remove plants with excessive insect infestation.