

# RCCG NEWS

## May 2026 RCCG Newsletter

### *RCCG Contact Information*

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### *2026 Important Dates*

#### **May 1**

Garden must be started

#### **Sunday, May 3**

First Inspection

#### **Sunday, May 17**

Inspection



## President's Message

Happy Mayday fellow gardeners!

So the Farmer's Almanac called for the last Spring frost to be on 16 April, but I had frosty dew on the grass almost a full week later. Hope folks weren't too impacted in the garden but it just goes to show that the weather can always surprise. Cooler weather means slower growth but weeds are still creeping. Hope you have had the time to get your garden cleaned up, weeded, and started growing things you want.

By now you may be getting the results of the first inspection. In

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general, no news is good news. If you do get a notice, please take it with grace and work to fix the indicated problem. If you have questions reach out to our inspections leads. Key is to communicate, sometimes details aren't clear and every once and a while there may be a misunderstanding. Most of the issues we've had with inspections historically are failures to communicate.

On a lighter note, horses are back! Not sure about the frequency and how long we'll have them, but it's a great Spring treat. Some fencing fixes in the paddock areas are still happening slowly, but this weekend was the first I've seen Park Police horses using the paddock for years since they opened the new stables down on Constitution Ave. One of the really nice things about our garden environment.

Please enjoy gardening and your garden bounty and be safe.

Joe Nelson



## Hazmat plan is under review thanks to President Joe

### Things we may have to do:

Put gas and oil containers in a drip pan or retaining bucket

Get a fire extinguisher, find a way to get it inspected yearly (maybe we have one)

Post signage around the shed

Investigate whether the shed meets the ventilation requirements

## Water Team update

We inspected all faucets to identify which ones need to be replaced in the near future. We replaced the underground hose to one faucet. We appreciate your assistance to identify any additional leaks that need immediate attention.

Please be careful when using the hoses. Do not yank them, which can cause the faucet to become unstable and wind them carefully for the next user.

Contact Duane Gelderloos with questions & issues – drgelder1@gmail.com

### You're Making Gardening Harder than It Needs to Be

Anita always finds interesting articles for us. This is one I think might be helpful for new gardeners and folks like me who need some courage to remind us sometime to "keep it simple, stupid."

[You're Making Gardening Harder Than It Needs to Be](#)

# First Inspection 2026

On Sunday, May 3rd we had our first garden Inspection. And what a glorious afternoon to be together! Thanks to the all the new and longtime gardeners who showed up, making it a full house of volunteers and an easy-peasy assignment. Stephanie Bruce led a welcoming and thoughtful introduction, reminding everyone we are in service to help build community as much as to support good gardening practices, and most communications should be taken as 'heads up' reminders and not punishments.

The great news is that most of our gardeners have started work on their plots which meet RCCG's management expectations. That may just be cleaning the plot of weeds, though several gardeners have gardened throughout winter or got an early spring headstart.

A big thanks to Thys Van Schaik, for stepping up to lead the committee and organizing the whole season of inspections so efficiently which made this opening day such a success. As he and Stephanie would like to remind all gardeners, here are a few golden rules:

1. Gardeners are responsible for keeping all bordering outside paths clear of weeds.
2. All fencing needs to be free of 'bunny' holes and secured upright with no vines pulling it down.
3. While gardening in a forest inevitably brings with it weed challenges, gardens must be cleaned of pernicious weeds regularly to stay ahead of the game. (Contact Anita Albertson, Queen Weed Warrior, to drop some knowledge, or ask her for help.)
4. Growing vegetables is our primary shared mission, but judiciously adding some flowers, especially pollinators, is permitted and now even encouraged.
5. Beware of plants that aggressively spread into others' plots such as mint and fennel. If planting such, use containers and deadhead those that flower.

## 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 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



## Featured Gardener - Michela Cirioni

By Susan Galbraith

We always like to welcome new gardeners. This month we celebrate Eliza Angelotti and Michela Cirioni who have joined RCCG this season. Michela and Eliza, both Italians, met in DC. Eliza has been away on an extended assignment, but I was happy to meet Michela in the garden.

Michela: Elisa and I met a few years ago at Flow Yoga in P Street and instantly became close friends, both being from Italy. It was our dream to be part of a community garden, and she signed up on the waiting list for RCCG. But it was as long process. Four years! We got an email finally and we were so excited. This is an example of how the US has amazing opportunities. This is essentially free land—yes?— as long as we take care of it . So we started a little more than a month ago. I live on Van Ness and I bike through Rock Creek almost every day. It is so beautiful. We are so lucky.

Did your family garden?

No, I grew up in Rome. As a big city, it does have a few community gardens, but I never had a chance for one. My co-gardener though comes from a town on the Adriatic, and her parents always had a garden, so he comes to it naturally, and we always ask them for advice.

*Do you get to go back to Italy, and what do you like to grow from there?*

Michela: Oh yes, three or four times a year. But it is forbidden to bring in plants. But then I go to Home Depot, and I find a lot of Italian varieties.

We love that our community is so international now. and excited to learn from you. What would you “bring to our table,” so to speak?

Michela: As Italians, foremost is our commitment to freshness, especially fresh herbs. To dress with olive oil and fresh herbs is at the heart of the healthy Mediterranean diet. There are serious health benefits to this superfood. For instance, parsley can detox you from heavy metals.

We bonded over her commitment to labor organizing as Michela works to support firefighters all around the country. I learned she is a Buddhist practitioner and yoga student. What a wonderful spirit to join our community! Be on the lookout for more about culinary and health benefits of herb in upcoming newsletters. Lemon Balm: A Calming Herb Your Body and Mind will Love



# Grow Your Own Potatoes

By Pam Ross

I'd always wanted to grow potatoes, but could never figure out how to fit them into my crowded plot. Once I learned that you need to rotate members of the nightshade family (potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, eggplant) so that no one of them was in a spot that another had been in for three years, I almost gave up. As you all know, practicing crop rotation in a 10'x20' plot isn't easy.

Then I discovered grow bags - soft sided bags with handles made from fabric that are specifically designed for gardeners who are short on space.



Why I like them:



- you can grow potatoes anywhere and maximize your planting space. I tend to put my potato bags in the paths inside my plot and move them as needed.
- you don't have to worry about crop rotation. Just use the bags exclusively for potatoes and refresh the soil in them every year. Make sure to avoid throwing any used soil into beds where you will be growing tomatoes, peppers or eggplants.
- when your potatoes are ready to pick, you can easily dig some out of the sides or just dump the whole bag.

# Spring's first 'fruit'- Rhubarb

Submitted by Jeremy Bernstein

While technically a vegetable, here in the mid-Atlantic rhubarb is really the first fruit of Spring (even before strawberries).

Emerging in late March, its pucker-inducing tartness and celery-like (ugh!) texture make it inedible. But "roasted with a bit of sugar, it transforms into a fruit that's jammy and tender, with a stringy silkiness almost like the inside of a long-roasted eggplant with an incredible balance of sweet and sour," says Allison Roman, the food writer.

Roasted rhubarb is delicious with Eton Mess, the traditional British dessert of crushed meringue, whipped cream, and (usually) strawberries (or other berries).

Alice Waters of Chez Panisse fame roasts hers with the zest and juice of an orange and recommends it as a dessert with sweetened cream or as a side dish for pork.

But roasting is just the beginning.

Recipes for cakes, tarts, galette, crumbles and crisps abound. Jams, pickles too. Rhubarb syrup makes a great addition to seltzer (with or without alcohol!)



And savory dishes too: in Iranian cuisine, rhubarb is often used to provide “just the right amount of tang” to traditional stews like khoresh rivas, says Naz Derivian, the Iran-born writer and actor.

So delicious but alas, so hard to grow in our area (at least for me). Seems our robust fruit can't take the heat, and frequently does not return after the winter, Not to worry though: there's usually a good supply at local markets and stores.

## Lemon Balm & Lemon Verbena

Lemon Balmerbena and ILemon Verbena are both popular citrus-scented herbs, but differ in scent intensity, plant structure, and culinary uses.

Lemon balm is a hardy herbaceous perennial herb. It comes back year after year, surviving harsh winters by dying back to the ground and sending up fresh growth in the spring. A member of the mint family, lemon balm is known for its vigorous growth. Keep these tips in mind when growing it: [1, 2, 3, 4]

- **Spreading:** Like mint, it spreads easily and can self-seed rapidly. To keep it from taking over your garden, it is often best grown in containers or you can trim off its flowering tops to prevent it from dropping seeds.
- **Sun and Soil:** It thrives in full sun to partial shade and prefers moist, well-drained soil, though it is quite drought-tolerant once established.
- **Harvesting:** Cutting the plant back frequently encourages fresh, bushy growth and the best-tasting leaves. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

Lemon balm is an excellent, citrus-scented addition to the garden that acts as a natural pest repellent and pollinator magnet. It grows best alongside tomatoes, squash, peppers, and brassicas (like cabbage and broccoli) because it deters aphids, squash bugs, and cabbage moths

Lemon verbena (*Aloysia citrodora*) is a woody shrub with a strong, sharp lemon scent, ideal for sweet dishes. Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) with its softer, sweeter, grassy-lemon aroma, is ideal for savory dishes. Both are excellent for herbal tea blends.

Lemon balm tea in particular is prized as a caffeine-free herbal drink renowned for reducing stress, improving sleep quality, and aiding digestion. Rich in antioxidants like rosmarinic acid, it helps alleviate anxiety, boost cognitive function, and ease stomach cramps. It may also have antiviral properties, useful for treating colds. Some say by reducing stress-eating, Lemon Balm can also aid in weight loss, but recommended along with dieting and exercise.



# Recipe Corner

## *Alice Waters' roast rhubarb*

### **Ingredients:**

- 2 pounds rhubarb
- 1 Valencia orange or other juice orange
- 1 cup sugar

### *Cooking Directions:*

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Rinse rhubarb quickly under cold water and wipe dry with clean towel.
- Trim and discard leaves and tough inch or so at the bottom.
- Cut lengthwise into 1/3" thick strips and then crosswise into 2" pieces (you should have 6 cups)
- Grate zest of orange and squeeze its juice into 9-10" nonreactive baking dish. Add rhubarb and sugar and toss everything together until rhubarb is coated with sugar and juice.
- Cover and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the cover and continue baking for another 5-10 minutes, or until a knife slides easily into the rhubarb. Serve warm or at room temp.

## *Mark Bittman's rhubarb crisp*

### **Ingredients:**

- 6 tablespoons cold butter, cut into small pieces, plus more for greasing pan
- 2½ to 3 pounds rhubarb, trimmed, tough strings removed, and cut into 1½-inch pieces (about 5 to 6 cups)
- ¼ cup white sugar
- 1 tablespoon orange or lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon orange or lemon zest
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon, or to taste
- Pinch of salt
- ½ cup rolled oats
- ½ cup pecans

**Cooking Directions:**

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Grease an 8- or 9-inch square baking or gratin dish with a little butter. Toss rhubarb with white sugar, orange or lemon juice and zest, and spread in baking dish.

*Spring Leek Soup*

By Stephanie Bruce

This is a soup I make every year as Spring breaks and leeks are harvested. Since the cool weather has been holding, soup is still on the menu. I first saw this on the public television series from the marvelous Jacques Pepin, and it has stuck in my rotation. It's very flexible for additions/modification, although cannellini beans really are the best type for this particular soup. I've added other notes on my variations below. The original is available at: [Episode 213: Earth to Table | Jacques Pepin: More Fast Food My Way](#) and there you can also find a printer-friendly PDF version.

Side note: white turnips are GREAT to grow in the garden, and have been very pest-resistant for me.

**RECIPE:**

As soon as the outside temperature dips below 50 degrees, I can't wait to make this vegetarian soup, which is ready in about half an hour. What goes into it is usually determined by the contents of my refrigerator: onions, leeks, scallions, carrots, celery, and salad greens are all good. Canned beans make it sturdy enough for a main course.

For a comforting lunch or dinner, serve with grated Gruyère on top and chunks of country bread as an accompaniment.

**4 servings (about 6 cups)**

- 4 cups water
- 1 medium leek, split, washed, trimmed (retaining most of the green), and cut into 1/2-inch pieces (about 2 1/2 cups)
- 1 cup peeled and diced (1/2-inch) carrot
- 1 cup peeled and diced (1/2-inch) white turnip (if i have them, i have also subbed in parsnips)
- 1 cup diced (1/2-inch) celery
- 2 tablespoons good olive oil
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt (I actually use much less, about a half to one teaspoon and adjust at the end)
- 1 can or jar (15.5 ounces) cannellini beans
- Optional (my addition) I keep Parmesan cheese rinds in the freezer, and add a lump of rind while cooking to bump up the umami)
- 1 cup grated Gruyère cheese, preferably an aged variety or parmesan
- Pieces of baguette or sturdy country bread
- 4 sprigs fresh parsley, for garnish (optional or chives,)

**Cooking Directions**

- Combine the water, leek, carrot, turnip, celery, oil, and salt in a large saucepan or pot.
- Bring to a boil, cover, reduce the heat to low, and boil gently for about 12 minutes.
- Add the beans, including the liquid, and bring to a boil again. Boil for a few minutes.
- Serve with crusty bread alongside.