

RCCG NEWS

June 2026 RCCG Newsletter

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2026 Important Dates

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

June 14

June 28

July 12

July 26



Garden Manager Notes

Fuel Storage and Garden History Archive

As some of you know, we are in a tussle with the NPS about keeping fuel in the steel shed for the mower and tillers. The consequence of which, we have earnestly (and sadly a bit late in time, given some of the gardeners of my memory are no longer with us) started to tussle with our garden's history and creating good archives/records.

The consequence of which Peggy shared this fabulous story with me about RCCG before it was RCCG, before we had critter

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fencing, when Mr. Olson was the garden manager and a character at that. I recommend the story to you. I have made it a gift article, so I hope everyone is able to open and read it. Here is a link to the story in New York Times at https://www.nytimes.com/1978/07/27/archives/a-gardener-heeds-the-call-of-the-soil-a-gardener-heeds-the-call-of.html?unlocked_article_code=i.mIA.ket-.URrJhoQYViKk&smid=url-share

Growing Tall Vegetables Tips

Tall items are best planted to shade your garden, i.e. to the south side of your plot and not to shade your neighbor's garden, i.e. to the north side. There's some tussle to the east and west re morning and evening sun, but the north and south positions are clear. For those compass challenged, the north side is Horse Stable Road. The south side is the woods with the tree skeletons. The east is the horse meadow. The west is Oregon Ave.

Wonders from the Garden in May, 2026, the Garden has Come Alive

by Anita Albertson

From the intentional things I have planted {asparagus, strawberries, bok choy, orach (mountain spinach), and collards}

- to the crafty weeds {oxalis and creeping cress}
- to the ants, slugs, caterpillars, gnats and flies
- to the demanding robins, wrens, and other feathered friends
- to the mating skinks who love my compost pile and black rat snake who likes my strawberry patch.

While I am more enthusiastic for the intentional plantings and feathered friends (except when they poke my red strawberries rendering them ant food) than I am for the many other living surprises – I know that my garden is rich with life because I am tending it to keep it healthy and in balance.

Last year I mistakenly let the wood sorrel (oxalis) winter over because I thought it was like clover and would fix nitrogen and therefore wasn't a "bad" ground cover. And while I now believe that was unhelpful – I have learned that Oxalis, commonly known as wood sorrel or false shamrock, can act as a dynamic living mulch, suppresses other weeds, and providing a rich nectar source for local pollinators. Its deep root system breaks up compacted dirt, while its edible, lemony foliage offers a zesty addition to salads. Still – balance is key – and what I had this Spring was out of balance.

Creeping yellow cress is another weed I struggle with – its benefits are erosion control, its medicinal and edible qualities when young and tender, its biodiversity and the support it gives pollinators and its demerits are that it is so darn aggressive and thrives underground by seed, root, and creeping stolons.

Our gardens are part of the tapestry of life begetting life. The holes in my kale could be from insects, birds or mammals. Slugs are breaking down plants, creating rich compost, even slowly pollinating (I just learned this!) all while also feeding the birds. Ants improve the soil and go after the aphids.

Caterpillars feed the birds. Flies are ecological heroes that sustain the ecosystem by accelerating decomposition of waste and carcasses, pollinating thousands of plants and serving as a foundational food source for birds, amphibians, and reptiles. Even the dreaded gnats which plague me when I weed –

because despite their annoying swarms, gnats are vital to ecosystems. As larvae, they decompose organic waste and enrich the soil. As adults, they act as critical pollinators for various flowers, and serve as an essential food source for birds, bats, fish, amphibians, and larger predatory insects.

Skinks (a kind of small lizard) are mating this time of year – they turn quite red in color when mating – as I discovered this week – mistaking a fight that was actually a courtship which surprised me in and around my compost!

Twice a black rat snake slithered out from my strawberries. Other than being startled by his companionship – I was prompted to learn a bit about him. Black rat snakes provide highly effective natural pest control by regulating rodent and small mammal populations without the need for toxic chemicals. They are docile, non-venomous, and excellent climbers, making them valuable for keeping gardens, barns, and homes free of disease-carrying pests.

So while I wait for my tomatoes, zucchini and tomatillos to grow, before I harvest my basil and peas, while the okra seeds become plants and the plants become edible pods....I will enjoy the diversity of life that my little plot of earth supports – filled with awe for this wonderful world! Spring's first 'fruit'

Featured Gardeners - Alison McBride and Janet Ranganathan

By Susan Galbraith

Alison and Janet's friendship spans 32 years, forged when their daughters were toddlers together at Wesley Nursery School in Bethesda. Both are immigrants from opposite ends of the United Kingdom — Alison from Glasgow, Scotland, and Janet from Helston, in the far southwest of Cornwall — which means they have spent three decades disagreeing about whether Scottish or Cornish weather is worse, while agreeing that Washington summers are an abomination.

Both have spent over three decades working at the same place: Janet as a Managing Director at the World Resources Institute and Alison as a Senior Investigator in the National Institutes of Health. Janet works at the scale of global systems and Alison works at the scale of viruses and DNA molecules. Between them, they cover life from biome to base pair.

Their parents' shared roots as children in wartime Britain shaped Alison and Janet's outlook on life. Their parents' childhood experiences taught them to be frugal, never waste food, and always save for a rainy day — advice that requires rather less effort to follow in Britain, where rainy days are the norm.

Getting Started

Janet's introduction to gardening came early, helping her grandparents on their small-holding farm as a child. Potatoes, fuchsias, dahlias, and ornamental pheasants loom large in her memories — a messy



Cornish combination, it must be said. Alison moved from Glasgow, to London, to DC and didn't have the opportunity (or sun) to really grow food until she got the plot at Rock Creek Garden. The passion was always there though, and she once grew a 50lb pumpkin in her Bethesda front yard that warranted a neighborhood field trip from her son's nursery school class.

In Janet's spare moments not spent working, she is kept happily busy playing with her three grandchildren, Capri (6), Kai (4) and Remi (2), nearby in Carderock — with a fourth due in July! All three grandchildren love gardening and hope to get on the RCCG waiting list! Beyond the garden, Alison pursues an ambitious project: she has 40 acres of forest in the Appalachian Mountains where she cultivates American Chestnut trees. The plan is to grow trees for possible cross with trees genetically modified to be resistant to the blight fungus (under review by USDA) or to treat with local, weaker hypovirulent strains of the fungus to compete with ubiquitous strains. She is, in other words, helping to save an entire species in her spare time.

The Gardening Plan (and What Happens to It)

Each season begins with optimism and a proper plan, accounting for sun direction, plant heights, and crop rotation to break disease cycles. Alison usually gets the soil tested for good measure. The plan tends to unravel somewhere around July.

Their fall garlic goes in reliably and is harvested around the time the tomatoes go in. Other regulars include peppers, tomatillos, leeks, carrots, spring greens, beets and kale — Alison preferring the Tuscan lacinato variety, Janet firmly in the curly camp. Onions have been a past triumph but have proved difficult in recent years, which they accept stoically, in the British tradition of not making a fuss about things.

Outside the allotment (plot), Alison favors a naturalistic gardening approach, championing native plants over the exotic varieties that dominate Bethesda gardens. Inside the allotment, she turns decidedly more scientific. She grows several types of tomatoes: a carefully curated mix of heirloom varieties prized for flavor (San Marzano, Brandywine, and Hillbilly) alongside disease-resistant F1 hybrids. In recent years she has also grown a purple tomato, genetically modified to express snapdragon anthocyanin genes. Many seeds go under basement lights early in the year or are winter-sown outdoors.



Janet takes what she describes as a more haphazard approach, which is a very Cornish way. Her non-Cornish specialty is Asian vegetables — bitter melon and long beans that her Sri Lankan husband prizes enormously. Neither Janet nor Alison can stomach bitter gourds, though Alison did find a cocktail recipe that made them, as she puts it, "not bad". This is high praise from a Scot. Janet's sentimental favorite tomato is the Shirley — her late mother's variety of choice back in England. She starts her vegetables from seed in April, in milk jugs left outside, which requires no basement laboratory.

A Word on Incidents

One season, an exceptionally aggressive butternut squash materialized from nowhere and proceeded to colonize not only their plot but several neighboring ones, displaying a territorial ambition that would have impressed Genghis Khan. Janet maintains she did not plant it. Alison maintains she knew nothing about it.

This was not their first brush with horticultural anarchy. An Asian spinach Janet planted seeded itself with such unbridled enthusiasm that it took several years to fully evict. Alison, meanwhile, permitted purslane to run rampant on the perfectly reasonable grounds that it was a superfood and therefore practically

medicinal. Both episodes ended in citations, which they received with the dignified embarrassment of people who absolutely know better. This year Alison's quest to save and transplant native violets, and the plan to allow fennel to flower to collect culinary pollen and seeds has probably earned them their first inspection citation of 2026.

Together, Alison and Janet garden with equal parts discipline and flexibility, science and instinct, planning and improvisation. Their plot reflects not perfection, but persistence, curiosity, and the willingness to keep growing—season after season.

Recipe Corner

Favorite recipe: Fresh Salsa

Adapted from Fresh Homestead Salsa from Homestead farm, Poolesville, MD and uses six ingredients grown in Rock Creek Garden:

- Four large tomatoes (chopped)
- Four tomatillos (chopped)
- One jalapeno pepper (finely chopped)
- Four spring green onions (finely sliced) or half cup red onion (chopped)
- 1 clove garlic (minced)
- One teaspoon salt
- Juice of a lime
- One tablespoon finely chopped cilantro

Mix and let stand for an hour to allow the flavors to blend.

Jean's Green Pie

We grow radishes, Lacinato kale, Swiss chard, and beets. In early summer when harvesting the vegetables, we keep the green tops of the vegetables and cook them together. Jean then makes a covered pie.

- Pie dough for bottom and top
- Green tops of radish, beets, or turnips (about 2 cups cut up)
- Swiss chard, kale or other greens (about 2 cups cut up)
- One onion and a garlic clove
- Herbs to taste like marjoram, thyme, cuban oregano and/or savory
- Olive oil and salt and pepper to taste
- Parmesan cheese
- One egg

Cooking Directions:

- Sauté onion, garlic and the cut greens together on low heat. Add salt, pepper and herbs to taste. Put aside to cool.
- Create the bottom pie crust
- Mix the cooked greens with one egg, salt and pepper and parmesan cheese
- Add greens mix to the pie crust
- Add a top layer of pie dough. Prick the dough on top to let out some steam during baking.
- Bake in 350F oven for about 30 mins

Serve cool or warm with a salad on the side

