

# RCCG NEWS

## August 2023 RCCG Newsletter

### *RCCG Contact Information*

Email: rockcreekgarden@gmail.com

Website:

www.rockcreekcommunitygarden.org

### *Important Dates:*

#### *Next Inspection*

**Sunday, August 20.**

#### *Fall Garden Picnic*

**Saturday, October 14**

#### *Fall Clean up*

**Saturday, October 14**



## Prepare for Fall Gardening

By Camilla Gagliolo

Extend your harvest into fall by planting second crops of cool season vegetables, such as peas, greens, lettuce, carrots, Napa and regular cabbage, kale, kohlrabi, Asian vegetables, radishes, spinach, and turnips. Planting these veggies in late summer/early fall will yield harvests long after your summer crops are finished.

Preparing your garden for fall gardening involves a combination of cleaning up, planting new crops, and ensuring your garden's overall health for the coming season. Here's a step-by-step guide to help you get started:

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**FEATURED  
GARDENER**  
Susan Galbraith

### \* Clean Up the Garden:

- Remove spent summer crops, weeds, and debris to create a clean slate for fall planting.
- Trim back any dead or overgrown vegetation to encourage healthy growth.
- Compost healthy plant material to enrich your soil.

### \* Soil Preparation:

- Add compost or well-rotted manure to improve soil structure and fertility.
- Consider adding a layer of mulch to help retain moisture, regulate soil temperature, and suppress weeds.

### \* Choose Fall Crops:

- Research and select suitable fall crops for our area. In Washington, DC, cool-season crops like lettuce, spinach, kale, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, and radishes thrive well in the fall.

### \* Planting:

- Follow the recommended planting dates for your chosen crops. In Washington, DC, late summer to early fall is a good time to plant.
- Space your plants according to their specific requirements to ensure healthy growth.
- Consider using row covers to protect your plants from early frosts.

### \* Watering:

- Water your new transplants thoroughly after planting to help them establish their roots.
- Monitor soil moisture throughout the fall, as plants still require consistent watering even as temperatures cool down.

### \* Pest and Disease Management:

- Keep an eye out for pests and diseases that may thrive in the fall. Remove any affected plants promptly to prevent the spread.
- Consider using natural pest control methods such as neem oil or insecticidal soap.

### \* Mulching:

- Apply a layer of mulch around your plants to help retain soil moisture and regulate temperature.

### \* Season Extension:

- If you want to extend your growing season further into the fall, consider using cloches, or row covers to provide protection from colder temperatures.

### \* Regular Maintenance:



Adding to our animal richness in the garden. A Box Turtle has been seen living in the garden!

- Continue to weed your garden as needed to prevent competition for nutrients and water.
- Monitor your plants regularly for any signs of stress, disease, or nutrient deficiencies.

Remember that the specific tasks and timing can vary based on the weather conditions and the specific crops you're planting. Keep an eye on local weather forecasts and adjust your gardening schedule accordingly.

## Inspection Notes

From the Inspection Team

This is the time of year that the fences start getting weighed down with the veggie vines and other plants that have been allowed to climb up or through the fences. Usually it is the case that the plant has just gotten away from us, but some folks literally plant with the intention of using the fence as a trellis.

The problem is that the weight of the plants during the season, and the tugging to remove the plants at the end of the growing season are hard on the fencing material and end up shortening the lifespan of the fence. RCCG volunteers will have to spend more time and we as a community will have to spend more money replacing the fencing than otherwise necessary.

When deciding where to plant vining crops or when plants are young is the best time to deal with this issue. Plant vines far enough away from external fences and direct them away from fences while they are growing. Provide independent trellises for your plants—do not use the plot fencing as your trellis.

Inspections send notices to people who have things growing through the fence. Believe me, the inspectors are also conflicted about faulting anyone for veggies growing up/through fencing. A healthy happy plant is a lovely thing we all celebrate. But please try your best to redirect the plant. And as with most of gardening, there is always next year! Next year you can make better location decisions and redirect the plant before it goes up/through the fence.

### Inspection Schedule

**August 20**

**September 10**

**September 24**

**October 8**

**October 22** - Final Inspection--garden should be tidied and put to bed, unless fall/winter gardening

## Herb and Flower Garden

By Linda Haslash

**Linda is a volunteer in the Herb and Flower Garden with some recommendations for how to enjoy and help the herbs**

**Sacred Basil:** There is a ton of it!!! We removed a large amount, leaving some for the bees, who love it dearly. Sacred Basil is a wonderful herb for SE Asian cooking. It is also the base herb for all of those Pukka teas that are so pricey but delicious. I am making a cold brew from its leaves, which is mild and quite refreshing. A pretty pale green tint, as well.

**Lavender:** There are two lavender bushes (Munstead) in the SW corner of the herb garden. Also good in tea!

**Hollyhock:** That beautiful pink Hollyhock!! Who hasn't stood in praise and rapture over this beauty!! I hope we will leave seed pods for next year and also have enough for gardeners who wish to try it on their own.

**Harvesting:** Yes!! Now's the time.

**Basils** will bush nicely when pinched back. Italian Parsley could use a gentle thinning.

**Sage** is wonderful now.

And **Rosemary**. There is also a lovely Pineapple Sage and Lemon Verbena.



The **Dill** is ready. Judicious thinning will help others to strengthen and grow tall. I'm amazed that it has carried on through the heat and humidity.

**Zinnias** love to be picked and reward us with bushiness and more blooms. Rachel Schenker has given us some seedlings of a 'giant' variety. Can't wait! Thank you, Rachel.

## How to Transform our Gardening Practices for How to Live Now

*An Interactive Conversation for Making RCCG Responsive to Climate Change*

By the Communications Team

Record breaking temperatures plague our community and across the nation, followed by violent electric storms and pounding rain, uprooting trees and worsening runoff. What can we do?

Can we get our gardeners to weigh in and problem solve together to make RCCG an ever-more responsive and proactive community?

Mulching, of course. Many of our gardeners use straw bales or shredded bark provided by the Park Service. Others lay down newspaper or cardboard. Cardboard, they claim, really helps with the weeds. Does anyone have any info on which is better for water retention?

When we water and how we water might need to be addressed. No "mad dogs-and Englishmen" in the midday sun surely is a no brainer but early vs. late? And watering deeply less frequently is recommended over sprinkling, but does less frequently mean anything when daily temperatures are cresting at 100 degrees?

Does containing with raised beds help? Should we invest in rainwater urns?

The fact we are growing and eating our own food is one step we have taken. Are there less thirsty vs more thirsty plants? How do we move back and forth to the garden? How might those of us who drive "take turns" in watering and other garden care?

Can we hear from you the tips you'd like to share? No need to write an essay, a line or two will do. We will publish them in our next newsletter.

Send your thoughts to [susankgalbraith@gmail.com](mailto:susankgalbraith@gmail.com)

# Keeping Tomato Plants Healthy

By Camilla Gagliolo

Tomatoes are one of our favorite vegetables to grow in the garden. Who does not love to pick a ripe, juicy tomato from the vine and eat it right there and then or make a summery tomato salad with basil, fresh onion and some good olive oil?

Organic care for tomato plants in the summer involves using natural methods and materials to promote healthy growth, protect against pests and diseases, and produce flavorful, chemical-free tomatoes. Here are some organic gardening practices to take care of your tomato plants during the summer:

- \* **Organic soil preparation:** Before planting, enrich the soil with compost, well-rotted manure, or organic matter. This will improve soil structure, drainage, and nutrient content, providing a healthy foundation for your tomato plants.
- \* **Mulching:** Apply organic mulch, such as straw, shredded leaves, or grass clippings, around the base of the tomato plants. Mulch helps retain moisture, regulate soil temperature, and suppress weeds. It also adds organic matter as it breaks down, enriching the soil.
- \* **Watering:** Water deeply and at the base of the plants to avoid wetting the foliage. Consider using a soaker hose or drip irrigation system to conserve water and prevent disease issues caused by wet leaves. Water early in the morning or late in the evening to reduce water evaporation.
- \* **Companion planting:** Utilize companion plants that help deter pests or attract beneficial insects. Some good companions for tomatoes include basil, marigold, borage, and chives. These plants can help repel pests and enhance pollination.
- \* **Natural pest control:** Encourage natural predators like ladybugs, lacewings, and praying mantises that feed on garden pests. Avoid using chemical pesticides that can harm beneficial insects and disrupt the ecosystem. If necessary, handpick pests off the plants or use insecticidal soap or neem oil, which are more environmentally friendly options.
- \* **Disease prevention:** Choose disease-resistant tomato varieties when possible. Proper plant spacing and good airflow can reduce the risk of fungal diseases. Rotate tomato plants with other crops each year to prevent soil-borne diseases from building up.
- \* **Organic fertilizers:** Feed your tomato plants with organic fertilizers like compost tea, fish emulsion, or seaweed extracts. These provide essential nutrients without the risk of chemical buildup in the soil.
- \* **Pruning:** Regularly prune tomato plants to improve air circulation and reduce disease risk. Focus on removing suckers and any diseased or damaged leaves.
- \* **Tomato support:** Provide sturdy stakes, trellises, or cages for your tomato plants to prevent them from sprawling on the ground. Supporting the plants keeps the fruit off the soil and reduces the likelihood of rot or pest damage.
- \* **Hand pollination:** If you notice poor fruit set, you can gently shake the flowers or use a small brush to transfer pollen between flowers and aid pollination.
- \* **Harvesting:** Harvest tomatoes when they are ripe to encourage continuous fruit production and prevent overripe fruits from attracting pests.



By following these organic gardening practices, you can nurture your tomato plants through the summer while promoting a sustainable and healthy garden environment. Organic methods benefit not only your plants but also the broader ecosystem, contributing to biodiversity and long-term soil health. Weed Warrior Report

## Featured Gardener- Susan Galbraith

As member of the Communications Team and long-time friend and colleague of RCCG gardener Camilla Gagliolo (she is certainly the tech brains and designer behind the Newsletter and Website and Archive Project,) I am happy to help with content so that our members can grow closer as a community and can learn and enjoy more about dirt, vegetables, and the humbling work of tending a garden.

As I've talked to our gardeners and interviewed individuals for features over the past few years, on more than one occasion I've been challenged to tell my own story. "Play fair." So here it is...

I signed up for RCCG around 1999 and learned almost immediately that the secretary of the garden at the time was Camilla Gagliolo with whom I had worked in tandem developing curriculum and leading international workshops in the International Baccalaureate (IB) system. What a joy, I thought, to continue our friendship, tending close by green healing plots that makeup RCCG!

What drew me to gardening? My mother was a farm girl raise in Indiana. If anyone has tasted an Indiana tomato or, for that matter, Indiana sweet corn, you know what I'm saying: you can't subsist on the same from Giant or Safeway

I'm not nearly the gardener of many of my neighbors, but I know what I like. I love spring greens, and even when kale and chard get bitter, I'm like "bring it on!"

Having grown up overseas as a State Department kid, I love unusual, international food and that means I like vegetables like Chinese pak choi, Thai chilis, and oh yes, Mexican marigold.

I keep my "strawberry hill" every year for my son who used to love coming to the garden for the berries. This year I'm very proud of an artichoke plant which grows like a curious sculptural entity in the middle of my plot, providing shade to my tiered rings of strawberries. I'm also finally successful this year with my new rhubarb plant. I can't wait for next year to cook up compot of rhubarb and strawberries.

And when I'm not in the garden? I serve as Artistic Director to Alliance for New Music-Theatre, a small company that develops and produces mostly original works across the spectrum of music-theatre. A lot of our work is cross-cultural such as a bi-cultural opera about migrants crossing our southern border and a partnership with Afghan artists about the remarkable, resilient history of Afghan women.

Making work like this is at times exhilarating but also complicated and sometimes intense. Coming out to the garden and working quietly weeding or watering, popping the occasional tiny tomato "candy" in my mouth, is wonderful, balancing therapy. Probably several of my gardening neighbors are gardening for similar reasons. Namaste.



# Poetry Corner

## *Ode to Tomatoes*

By Pablo Neruda

Translated by Margaret Sayers Peden

The street  
filled with tomatoes  
midday,  
summer,  
light is  
halved  
like  
a  
tomato,  
its juice  
runs  
through the streets.  
In December,  
unabated,  
the tomato  
invades  
the kitchen,  
it enters at lunchtime,  
takes  
its ease  
on countertops,  
among glasses,  
butter dishes,  
blue saltcellars.  
It sheds  
its own light,  
benign majesty.  
Unfortunately, we must  
murder it:  
the knife  
sinks  
into living flesh,  
red  
viscera,  
a cool  
sun,  
profound,  
inexhaustible,  
populates the salads  
of Chile,

happily, it is wed  
to the clear onion,  
child of the olive,

and to celebrate the union  
we  
pour  
oil,  
essential  
onto its halved hemispheres,  
pepper  
adds  
its fragrance,  
salt, its magnetism;  
it is the wedding  
of the day,  
parsley  
hoists  
its flag,  
potatoes  
bubble vigorously,  
the aroma  
of the roast  
knocks  
at the door,  
it's time!  
come on!  
and, on  
the table, at the midpoint  
of summer,  
the tomato,  
star of earth,  
recurrent  
and fertile  
star,  
displays  
its convolutions,  
its canals,  
its remarkable  
amplitude  
and abundance,  
no pit,  
no husk,  
no leaves or thorns,  
the tomato offers  
its gift  
of fiery color  
and cool completeness.



# Hammerhead Worms

By Garden Manager

Regarding recent news reports about hammerhead worms. Don't worry about them. We have bigger issues with pinella ternata and maybe the jumping worms.

Hammerheads are mostly sensitive to light so generally not around much in the day. They multiply easily from bits and pieces of themselves, so you have to remove the whole thing to kill it. They are toxic, so don't handle with bare hands. Don't eat them. Don't let your dogs eat them. That all having been said, they have been around the DC area (i.e. DMV) for a while, and haven't yet become an issue for the garden. See: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2023/07/22/hammerhead-worms-invasive-poisonous-dc/>.

The Maryland Biodiversity FB page says:

Maryland has three species of hammerhead worm. All three species are in the genus Bipalium: Bipalium adventitium, Bipalium kewense, and Bipalium pennsylvanicum. The three species can be easily identified.

**Bipalium adventitium:** Appears to be the most common of the three species in Maryland. It is a small worm that typically reaches three inches long. It is orange/yellow in color and has a single black stripe that runs down the back.

**Bipalium pennsylvanicum:** Uncommon in Maryland. This species is also small, typically reaching a length of three inches. This worm has three stripes that run down the back, and is also orange/yellow in coloration.

**Biplaium kewense:** The rarest hammerhead worm documented in Maryland. This worm can be quite long compared to the other two species. It can reach a length of almost sixteen inches. Even smaller individuals can be easily identified by the five dark lines that run down the back.

Photo of Bipalium pennsylvanicum by Mary Sweet.

