

RCCG NEWS

March 2023 RCCG Newsletter

RCCG Contact Information

Email: rockcreekgarden@gmail.com

Website:

www.rockcreekcommunitygarden.org

Important Dates:

Spring Meeting

Saturday, March 12 at 10 a.m.

Chevy Chase Community Center

Plant Swap

Saturday, May 7 starting at 9 a.m.

After you have planted your seedlings and you have left over plants, come meet old and new friends and share plantings.



Welcome to 2023 Gardening Season

Hello fellow gardeners.

Wanted to give you my guidance, perspective for the season.

✱ Be a good gardener. Keep your garden free of weeds and pests. Maintain the integrity of your fencing and paths. Don't make your weeds and issues other gardeners problems. If you need help ask. If you plan to be gone for time, please arrange for care of your garden and let us know.

✱ Respect other gardeners. This starts with taking care of your

1

2023 SEASON

Welcome to a new gardening season

2

IN MEMORIAM

James E. Pittman

3

SOIL PREPARATION

Time for soil preparation

4

FEATURED GARDENER

Lena Heron

7

POETRY CORNER

garden so it's not a problem for others. Look out for them, if some of them need help or advice, please help. We have many gardeners of different abilities both in their knowledge level and their skill sets. Learn from them, let them learn from you. Share with each other.

- * Be safe. Don't garden alone or at night. Keep a phone and the park police and DPS numbers with you. Be careful around garden tools and don't overdo it. Don't garden if you feel sick and practice good health measures based on current guidance.
- * Help build community. Volunteer if you are able. You can serve the garden in many many ways, some right from your home or office. One area of our critical needs is creating the content and communicating with articles like you are reading in this newsletter or website. Sharing your knowledge is volunteering. Of course we also need many people to do things in the garden to maintain it. We need help and support for understudies for many of the committee leads and garden manager tasks as not everyone can be there every day the entire season. If you see something that looks out of place, let someone know, or lend a hand. If you have suggestions to make things better, please reach out and let us know.
- * Finally and most importantly, enjoy the garden. Your garden should bring you joy and happiness. If it doesn't then maybe re-think your garden plan or how you approach the garden. Gardening is work and it should be a chore with a reward in doing and/or what comes out of it.

I wish you all an enjoyable gardening seasoning which sees you staying safe, improving as a gardener, and celebrating being a member of our gardening community.

Joe Nelson, RCCGA President

Comings and Goings

We have eight new gardeners joining us this 2023 season.

Joan Black	Nancy Friedmann
Douglas Beakes	Klem Harris
Cef Meade	Louise Eby
Lauren Sion	K Batch

Please welcome our new gardeners.

The Community Herb and Flower Garden

Kathy Gallagher would like to hear from gardeners what herbs they would like to see in our shared Herb and Flower Garden.

In Memorium James E. Pittman

On November 10 last Fall, we lost one of our most respected and beloved gardeners. Jim had so many interests and he was an avid gardener. He made time to serve the RCCGA community, including drawing up the original by-laws. He had such pride in his squash, tomatoes, collard greens, peppers, eggplant and especially okra and would always share of harvest with fellow gardeners before running some of his veggies down to friends at his Florida Avenue Baptist Church. Jim was devoted to his wife Herta and cared for her with great tenderness the last few years of her life. Herta passed earlier last year. We shall miss Jim and think about the high bar this man set as a gardener, a keeper of community and human being.



Now is the time for soil preparation

By Camilla Gagliolo

Spring is a wonderful time to start preparing the soil for gardening. Whether you're an experienced gardener or just starting out, taking the time to properly prepare the soil will help ensure a successful and bountiful growing season.

- * The first step in preparing your soil is to remove any weeds or debris that may have accumulated over the winter. This can be done with a hoe, rake or by hand, depending on the size of your garden. Removing weeds and debris will not only help create a clean slate for planting, but it will also help prevent pests and diseases from taking hold.
- * Once the garden has been cleared, it's time to assess the soil. A good quality soil should be loose and crumbly, with a dark color and a sweet earthy smell. If your soil is heavy and compacted, you may need to loosen it up with a garden fork or tiller. This will allow air, water, and nutrients to penetrate deeper into the soil, which is essential for healthy plant growth.
- * Next, it's important to test the pH level of your soil. Most garden plants prefer a pH level between 6.0 and 7.0, so if your soil is too acidic or too alkaline, you may need to make adjustments. Adding lime to acidic soil can help raise the pH level, while sulfur can be added to alkaline soil to lower it.
- * Once the pH level has been adjusted, it's time to add organic matter to the soil. Organic matter can come in many forms, including compost, well-rotted manure, and leaf mold. Organic matter helps improve soil structure, provides nutrients, and encourages beneficial microorganisms that help break down organic matter and improve soil fertility.
- * When adding organic matter, it's important to incorporate it into the soil. This can be done with a garden fork or tiller, or by hand with a shovel. Ideally, organic matter should be mixed into the top 6-8 inches of soil, where most plant roots are located.

Preparing the soil for gardening in the spring is an important step in ensuring a successful growing season. By removing weeds and debris, loosening the soil, adjusting the pH level, and adding organic matter, you can create a healthy and fertile growing environment for your plants. With a little bit of effort and attention, you can enjoy a bountiful harvest of fresh vegetables, fruits, and flowers throughout the growing season.

Planting Guide

By Camilla Gagliolo

Washington DC has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons, so what you can plant in the early spring depends on the weather conditions at that time. In general, the average last frost date in DC is around April 13th, so it's best to wait until after that

RCCG Gardener's Tips

March is the month for preparing the soil, and that means getting ahead of the weed *Dichondra*. Dig out now or spend the whole season at war as it takes over.

Planting Guide

University of Maryland Home and Garden Information Center has an excellent guide for planting vegetables in our region. Check it out [here](#)

date to plant anything that is sensitive to frost.

Here are some vegetables that you can consider planting in the early spring in Washington DC:

- * Vegetables: spinach, lettuce, kale, peas, radishes, carrots, beets, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and onions. These vegetables are all cold-tolerant and can withstand some frost.
- * Lettuce and other leafy greens: Cool-season crops like lettuce, spinach, and kale can be planted in early spring for a spring harvest.
- * Peas: Peas are another cool-season crop that can be planted in early spring. They prefer cooler temperatures and will stop producing once the weather gets too hot.
- * Radishes: Radishes are a quick-growing crop that can be planted in early spring and harvested in just a few weeks.
- * Herbs: Herbs like parsley, chives, and cilantro can be planted in early spring for fresh herbs throughout the growing season.



It's always best to check with your local nursery or refer to the University of Maryland Home and Garden Center [planting guide](#) to determine the best planting times and techniques for your specific location in Washington DC.

	February				March				April				May				June				July				August				September				October				November				December				
Week	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
Asparagus																																													
Beets, Leaf																																													
Beets, Sugar																																													
Beets																																													
Broccoli																																													
Brussels sprouts																																													
Cabbage																																													
Carrots, Chopped																																													
Carrots/peas (Mushrooms)																																													
Corn																																													
Cucumbers																																													
Eggplant																																													
Kale																																													
Kidney beans																																													
Peas																																													
Spinach																																													
Tomatoes																																													
Zucchini																																													

It's important to note that the weather in Washington DC can be unpredictable in the spring, so it's always a good idea to check the weather forecast before planting anything.

Featured Gardeners - Lena Heron

Interview with Lena Heron by Susan Galbraith

Lifelong gardener and world traveler, Lena Heron learned gardening from her parents who worked on an organic herb farm while in college, and spent several years doing a “chop wood, carry water” lifestyle, during which she grew a lot of her own food—fruits and veggies including drying, canning, and freezing stuff for the winter. She even learned to can and make her own sauerkraut.

I asked Lena about her life and when she came to Washington.

Lena: I moved to Washington with my husband in the late 1990's and have two boys (18 and 16). We still live in the house we bought in 2000. I worked on international rural development for USAID for 20 years— focused mostly on risk and resilience, finance and agricultural markets.

My husband's job took my family to Singapore to live for four years (2015-2020). It's high-rise living there, so I really missed gardening. We returned during the pandemic, and I spent plenty of time reclaiming my home gardens that had become so overgrown. But my home gardens have never had a great area for growing vegetables—too much shade. I was thrilled when my name finally came up last year (spring 2022) for a plot in the community garden.

Susan: Lena, you joined RCCG only last year, but you have already earned the unofficial title of "Spirit of Volunteerism." You not only jumped in to help with whatever was needed but in your first year stepped up when an Inspection Team Leader position was vacated.

Lena: At once I found the people so friendly and generously sharing thoughts and extra veggie plants. I remember going home and saying to my husband, "These are my people."

Susan: We all are so grateful for how much you contribute to our community. Would you share your thoughts about the role volunteering plays in our community garden?

Lena: There are so many jobs to make our community work better, so many different tasks that need to be done. I see that the weight can fall on a few people. It would help if the tasks were distributed a little more evenly. I think if people understood there is a job for every level of interest and capacity. Our gardeners are, of course, busy with their lives but they are wonderful resources.

Susan: The community to thrive is all about an organic relationship, isn't it?

Lena: Maybe we need to make a more specific ask of people. It really takes a village.

Susan: What do you like to grow?

Lena: I am not really a big summer gardener. I like spring and fall gardening, cooler weather vegetables. And I love greens. I am switching plots this year, so I haven't started anything yet.

I will grow tomatoes but only one or two. I think I might try a cantaloupe this summer. Cantaloupe and zucchini.

Susan: And what do you think about events? Before Covid, we had Spring plant swaps, Saturday morning yoga in the field, and a Harvest potluck in the Fall. Our wonderful fellow gardener Sonya Sutton had suggested a midsummer picnic and musical program. Should we try to start up such offerings again?

Lena: It really is all about being present and finding ways to participate and support each other's needs. And, for some, being part of our community means giving just a little more time and contributing in some way to the common good. For others, maybe it is about loosening your standards just a little and understanding others are at different stages of life or with competing needs or simply have different approaches and styles to gardening.



Recipe Corner

This Irish Potato Leek Soup is creamy and decadent and uses only FOUR ingredients – potatoes, leeks, broth, and plenty of butter – with no cream or milk! It's a beautifully simple recipe for St. Patrick's Day, when leeks are in season and the weather is still cool.

Ingredients

- 8 tablespoons butter divided, preferably Irish salted butter
- 3 large leeks white and light green parts only, halved and sliced, washed thoroughly
- 2 - 2½ pounds russet potatoes about 3 medium potatoes, peeled and diced
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- Salt and pepper to taste
- chopped chives, bacon, and/or sour cream for serving (*optional*)

Instructions

1. Melt 6 tablespoons of the butter in a large pot over medium heat.
2. Add the leeks, stir to coat in the butter. Cook for approximately 10 minutes over medium heat, stirring occasionally but not too frequently, until the leeks are meltingly tender and soft. You don't want them to brown- if they are browning, turn down the heat.
3. While the leeks are cooking, peel and dice the potatoes a (2 lbs.) into 1/2" pieces. Tip: The smaller the pieces are diced, the shorter time the soup will take to cook.
4. After the leeks are cooked, add the peeled and diced potatoes, chicken broth (4 cups), and some kosher salt and black pepper. *Use more salt if you are using unsalted butter and/or low sodium chicken stock.* Bring to a boil.
5. Cover, turn the heat to low, and simmer for 10-15 more minutes, until potatoes are cooked through (use the tines of a fork to test the potatoes - if they pierce them very easily, the potatoes are done).
6. Use an immersion blender to puree the soup directly in the pot. Alternatively, you can blend it in batches using a standing blender, or you can use a potato masher for a more rustic, lumpy texture.
7. Turn off heat and stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter until melted. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary. *Tip: Don't be shy with the salt - this soup needs plenty of it!*
8. Serve topped with chopped fresh chives, cracked black pepper, crumbled bacon, and/or sour cream, if desired. To feel you're truly back in Ireland, serve with Irish brown bread smothered in butter and wash it down with Guinness.

When she is not in the garden, you might find Lena at a crew regatta, following her sons' passion.

Poetry Corner

March, and so much is stirring. The daffodils popped early, and RCCG gardeners are getting a jump on planting. In honor of spring, we bring William Wordsworth's most beloved poem

I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

