

RCCG NEWS

September 2023 RCCG Newsletter

RCCG Contact Information

Email: rockcreekgarden@gmail.com

Website:

www.rockcreekcommunitygarden.org

Important Dates:

Next Inspection

Sunday, September 10.

Fall Garden Picnic

Sunday, October 1, 5 pm

Fall Clean up

Saturday, October 14, 9 am



Notes from President

Happy (soon to be) fall fellow gardeners. Last month we had a nice background on how to get you're your garden ready and prepared for fall planting. I myself enjoy a modest fall garden which includes late season squash (volunteer pumpkins this year!), a mixture of lettuce, kale, collards and other plants which will give modest bounty in fall and even survive through the winter. We'd love to hear from you on what might be your successes and tips for fall gardens.

I hope you've had a good garden season, the weather has been mild and the rain has been reliable to make for a pretty decent growing season. So glad that you are all part of the garden and we

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**FEATURED
GARDENER**
Susan Galbraith

hope you've been able to enjoy this season. As you either wind down from the primary growing season or start fall crops, make sure to keep up with weeds and garden upkeep. Either before or after the cleanup, it is the right time to consider soil amendments/mulch and the like that can do work for us while your garden is dormant. Realize that inspections are extended this year into October and past cleanup so please make sure to keep your garden weeds to a dull roar and ensure vines and other wanted plants are contained well within your garden.

Please join us for cleanup, not only will it be a day for doing many of the things needed to winterize the garden, but it will also be a day of community that allow all of us to visit and enjoy each other and celebrate the end of the main season. I want to thank all those that volunteered for the many tasks and committee we have that keep the garden running smoothly. If you haven't volunteered please consider it for next year and it may not be too late as I'm sure the garden manager has a list of to do's prior or during clean up.

Garden Fall Cleanup

Clean up will officially start around 9 a.m on October 14. Trash pick-up still needs to be confirmed, so no leaving trash around the interior meadow in advance of the day. Garden manager will get some paper bags in advance of the day and confirm whether a group pick-up will be available, closer to the date.

We'll have our usual snack food pot luck for the workers. Feel free to bring anything you think is good for a work break.

Inspection Notes and Accolades

From the Inspection Team, Lena Heron

A round of applause and hearty thank you to our fellow gardener, Juliet. Gardeners with plots on the perimeter know how hard it is to battle the grasses and other weeds that want to reclaim RCCG territory for the meadow. Over the years, Juliet has done a great job maintaining her external fence line in her plot at the far end of the C row. This year she has also been trimming the grass and weeds around the outside edge of the entire RCCG garden area, especially those areas that the mowers can't reach—making it much easier for gardeners to maintain their fence lines. Thank you, Juliet!

Inspection Schedule

September 10

September 24

October 8

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

Mulchies for Water Retention

By Janis Alcon

I prefer straw for the way straw mulch manages water, as well as for its other benefits. Straw lowers the soil temperature so plants do not need so much water during hot summer months. Straw allows the summer rain to percolate down into the soil (not just run off) and buffers the pounding impact of heavy raindrops (unlike plastic). Straw reduces evaporation from the soil surface — so that the garden soil stays evenly moist. Even moisture keeps the soil healthy - it creates good growing conditions for the foundational microorganisms and earthworms that in turn create healthy organic garden soil that makes water readily available to roots. Straw also does a fabulous job of preventing weed growth during the growing season. And by the growing season's end, the straw has added new organic matter to the garden soil, as it was slowly been consumed by soil micro-organisms.

Plastic mulch can be used to keep soil more moist, but plastic mulch contributes to microplastic contamination of the garden and its surroundings. Plastic mulch residues create microplastics that enter our bodies and cause myriad human health problems as well as disrupt the health of the soil itself.

Wood chips can also help the soil retain water and reduce weeds, and they seem to be particularly popular in our community garden. Wood chips make the soil just below the chips more acidic which can bother some plants. And wood chips deplete Nitrogen from the soil while the chips slowly decay, so it's good to put wood chips over a layer of something like compost (see ref below re wood chips in vegetable gardening).

What is one other big factor to consider in choosing a mulch? Enhancing carbon sequestration by soil is a rising concern in the global effort to slow/avert climate change. Fields/gardens using plastic mulch sequester less soil carbon, and no-tillage agriculture with straw mulch creates the highest carbon sequestration and most healthy biodiverse soil. I couldn't find any studies specifically assessing whether woodchip mulching is an effective way to sequester carbon. Wood (trees) sequester carbon from the atmosphere, but the carbon in the tree is then released back into the atmosphere when wood rots. On the other hand, the rotting woodchips in the garden create substrate for organisms that trap atmospheric carbon in the soil; and globally soil is believed to be the greatest carbon sink.

Another way to reduce water use in our gardens? Ollas. This year we tried burying two specially shaped pottery jars ("ollas") in the garden, in order to use less water. The ollas work by keeping the soil moist down at the level of the plant roots, so you need to water the garden less often. The ollas worked as promised!

References:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S030438942202249X>

<https://www.wur.nl/en/activity/Microplastics-in-the-agroecosystem-effects-of-plastic-mulch-film-residues-on-the-soil-plant-system-1.htm>

<https://aces.illinois.edu/news/could-microplastics-soil-introduce-drug-resistant-superbugs-food-supply>

<https://meetingorganizer.copernicus.org/EGU2020/EGU2020-13733.html>

Soil nitrogen and carbon storages and carbon pool management index under sustainable conservation tillage strategy:

<https://donotdisturbgardening.com/do-wood-chips-deplete-soil-of-nitrogen-here-are-the-facts/>

<https://lovelygreens.com/how-to-make-diy-ollas-low-tech-self-watering-systems-for-plants/>

Weed Team Report

By Anita Albertson

It is that time of year where the weeds are happy and threatening to go to seed. Catch them. Don't let them spread. Remember a weed is a plant where you don't want it!

Volunteers will show up in your garden thanks to the birds who love the seeds.

✱ *Fennel Seed* - Collect it. Cook with it. Dig it up and saute the plant. Don't let those seeds spread.

✱ *Garlic Chives* - Eat the scapes. Let the bees enjoy the flowers.

But once they turn to seed - cut those seed pods and get rid of them or you will have a carpet of garlic chives thicker than a 1970s wall to wall.....

- * *Pinellia Ternata* (lily weed) is surging again. Dig it up. Pluck its seed pod. When the season is done - do a more fierce digging around the fence line and plot dividers to get the rhizomes up.
- * *Yellow Rocket (cress)* - This weed is *barbarea vulgaris* and looks like wild broccoli. It is a fall germinating rosette with oblong leaves that are scalloped and irregular -- they spread and love to wedge themselves between fences and throughout gardens.
- * *Thistles* - Tall and prickly - it requires persistent pulling. Single root system can produce what looks like multiple plants. Use a dandelion prong to get it up. Wear gloves.
- * *Crabgrass* - Difficult to control and it spreads. No real benefit to wildlife, pollinators or people. Pull it. Don't compost.
- * *Nutsedge* - These are plentiful and going to seed. Please pull them in your gardens and on the public paths. It has little edible nutlets/tubers. Don't plow them under or they will spread.
- * *Violets* - You can eat the flowers. My reference book (Nancy Gift's Good Weed, Bad Weed) says they don't need to be controlled. My garden begs to differ. I left them unimpeded and now my strawberries and paths are resplendent with many, many violet plants - pretty yes - but fewer could still be adequately pretty.
- * *Ground Ivy* - Easy to pull - but it spreads and finds its way to hard to get at spots.
- * *Wild strawberries/Mock strawberries* - Yellow flowers, pithy fruit. Toxic to horses. Just pull it to keep it under control.
- * *Dichondra Repens* - Little kidney shaped leaves that spread like a dense steppable carpet. Great for home landscaping. Frustrating for the garden as it can crowd out good plantings.

Tree Volunteers

- * Elms
- * Tulip poplars
- * Mulberries

Vine Volunteers

- * Porcelain Berry
- * Wild Grape
- * Morning Glory
- * Bind Weed
- * English Ivy
- * Honey Suckle. Not good for the fencing. Can cause an allergic reaction through skin contact. Please remove.

Mother Dirt

Happy Harvest Moon Gardeners!

By Camila Karam

Time to discuss harvesting! September is traditionally the proper time to harvest and store our gifts from Nature in the northern hemisphere. September is also Autumn Equinox time where we have equal amount of day and night. A powerful time to honor and acknowledge the abundance of food with feasting and celebration.

I want to share with you that I went blackberry picking at a local farm and it was so much fun. Blackberries are delightfully delicious and freeze well. I urge you to visit a local farm and experience the over-abundance of berries.

The season of Virgo (August 23 -September 23) is the ideal time to dig root crops. You can dig up beets, carrots, peanuts, potatoes, and turnips. Here is a tip: root crops dug in the late afternoon will keep better because the energies gathered during the earlier part of the day are in the plant in the most concentrated form. Carrots should be harvested when they are about 3 to 4 inches long. They can stay in the soil quite a while, but if they stay too long, they will become tough and woody. Following Virgo season is the season of Libra... Autumn Equinox time!

Many Rock Creek Park gardeners have loads of tomatoes so here are some recipes for you to enjoy. They are simple and delicious.

Recipe Corner

Tomato Basil Salmon

Ingredients

- 2 boneless salmon fillets
- 1 tablespoon of fresh or dried basil * there is no rule here
- 1 large tomato, thinly sliced
- 1 tablespoon of olive oil
- 2 tablespoons of grated parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Line a baking sheet with a piece of aluminum foil, and spray with a non-stick cooking spray. Place the salmon fillets on the foil. Sprinkle with the basil, top with tomato slices, drizzle with olive oil, and sprinkle with the parmesan cheese.

Bake in the preheated oven until the salmon is opaque in the center, and the parmesan cheese is lightly brown on top...about 20 minutes.

Roasted Tomato, Avocado, and fresh Mozzarella Crostini

Ingredients

- 2 vine ripened tomatoes, cut into ¼ inch slices

¼ cup of olive oil, divided
Salt and fresh ground pepper, to taste
2 tablespoons of butter
8 diagonally slice pieces baguette
1 clove of garlic, halved
8 ounces of fresh mozzarella cheese, cut into 8 thin slices
1 large avocado, halved, pitted, and thinly sliced
½ small lemon
¼ cup chopped fresh dill
A pinch of salt



Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Line a baking dish with parchment paper.

Arrange the tomato slices on the baking sheet and top with olive oil, salt, and pepper.

Roast in the preheated oven until they are wilted, wrinkly, and scorched in some places, 25 -30 minutes. Set aside to cool.

Heat butter in a large skillet and rub garlic onto each slice; sprinkle salt over bread.

Lay mozzarella cheese on the toasted bread and top with avocado slices. Sprinkle a little salt over avocado and squeeze a little lemon over it. Top with roasted tomato and dill. Drizzle remaining olive oil over crostini and sprinkle with a little salt.

Plump Ginger-Cumin Shrimp, Tomato, Zucchini with Coconut Oil (served over rice)

Ingredients

1 cup of rice (it could be white rice, basmati brown rice, black rice or just plain brown rice)
1 large tomato
2-3 cloves of garlic
1 large zucchini or 2 medium size
8-10 shrimp (wild caught)
Coconut oil (2 1/2 heaping tablespoons)
½ teaspoon of ground cumin
1 tablespoon of finely chopped ginger
Salt
Fresh ground pepper

Cook your rice. You can prepare this while your rice is cooking. Rice usually takes about 45-60 minutes. Time yourself.

Clean and devein shrimp.

Cut up your tomato in any form you wish. Put aside.

Chop the garlic. Put aside.

Slice zucchini diagonally...not too thin.

Heat up a skillet and put in the coconut oil.

Add the garlic and brown it slightly...do not overcook. Add the ginger.

Add the shrimp and cook until done...toss shrimp as it is cooking in coconut oil, about 7 minutes.

Add the zucchini and tomato and toss with the shrimp. Cook until the tomato and zucchini are cooked but not over-cooked! It will begin to smell so good.

Season with salt and fresh ground pepper.

Serve over rice.

Note: this is something I cook a lot so I do not really measure but I think this is accurate. The coconut oil gives it a nice flavor.

I hope you enjoy these recipes! Enjoy your abundance from Nature! Give gratitude...always.

Coyote Sightings

By Garden Manager

RCCG Manager Rima shared with us news from the Park Service about coyote sightings in Rock Creek park.

In 2019 and 2020, DCP Research Lead Lindsay Powers installed [field camera traps](#) in four of Rock Creek Park's tributary areas: Pinhurst Parkway Park, Soapstone Valley Park, Melvin C. Hazen Park, and Piney Branch Park. Coyotes were seen in all of the parks, and nearly all coyote sightings occurred at night and in the early morning when there were few (if any) people around. Coyotes used the trails within the four tributary parks to move away from and toward Rock Creek Park, which suggests that coyotes use these parks as green travel corridors into more developed surrounding areas. The camera trap data also provided evidence that foxes might avoid coyotes in areas where their home ranges overlap, as foxes were seen more frequently when at least a few days had passed since the last coyote sighting.

Read Lindsay Powers complete thesis on the [movement, diet, and vocalization of Eastern coyotes in an urban environment](#) here. If you sight a coyote, you can report It to: <https://www.districtcoyotes.org/>

Not-so-funny Bunny Business

By Garden Manager

You may have seen Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-Tail hippity-hopping down our chipped paths and through several of our plots. Rows of tender Fall plantings of lettuces and swiss chard have proven to be a veritable bunny buffet.

Although there is no official mandate, good *bunny* fences [*do*] make good neighbors.

Here are steps we encourage you to make now:

- ✱ Step 1. Check your perimeters. Even if your plot has had some form of bunny fencing, closely investigate to see if any has come loose. Even the smallest hole in your line of defense can make the difference between you or small bunnies getting the greens.
- ✱ Step 2. Contact your neighbors. Perhaps it's a quadrant issue. See if you can work together to solve the problem. A fellow gardener may be unaware or overwhelmed how to fix the situation. Be open to the suggestion of bunny-proofing your shared area.
- ✱ Step 3. Buy and install small hole fencing. Make sure it's mesh wire and black. (Bunnies nibble through plastic.) First, dig up and clean thoroughly the area against boards of pernicious weeds such as lily weed and wire grass. Strongly secure fencing to bottom boards along all sides, including doors. You may want to weave plastic ties along the upper edges so the fencing doesn't flap or scratch you when you are working in your plot.

P.S. There has in the past been left over bunny fencing in the shed. Check there first

Featured Gardener - Peggy Cloherty

Peggy Cloherty has been a long-standing member of the RCCG community and, as someone who holds a lot of our community's history, it was such a pleasure to get her perspective on how the garden has evolved.

Peggy: I started gardening in the early 1980's. Bill and I had moved to the area in 1979, and we didn't have any sun in our yard. I wanted to grow some vegetables and found out about this community garden but learned there was a long waiting list. So, my husband suggested I should volunteer at the Nature Center. In those days a ranger was in charge of managing the community gardens. So, I would go over and do little odd jobs – office work or whatever they needed – and lo and behold, the following spring there was a plot for me. And then, shortly thereafter, the Interior Department cut its budget so sharply, there was a re-examination of what employees did, and the change in policies meant that we had to manage ourselves, including getting a charter.

So, I joined. I didn't know much about gardening. But there were people like Gilda Schenker, Rachel's mother, and James Pittman, Jim Prust and Susan Davis, all seasoned gardeners, and I learned a lot from them. Jim Pittman taught me about greens and okra. And there was a former sharecropper named Jerry, who used to stand over me, saying, "Now Mrs. Cloherty, you're doing that all wrong. See those tops of greens on your carrots? Cut them down to no more than eight inches. That makes the plant put all its energy into the carrot!"

For instance, I didn't know anything about soil preparation, and Gilda, whom I called Queen of Soil preparation, showed me how important it was. Even if she started her garden well after I had, two months later her vegetables were always flourishing.

In those days there was an Herb Garden and separate Flower Garden. The Flower Garden was especially beautiful then, and when somebody died, people would add something like a rose bush in their memory.

The Herb Garden, on the other hand, had fallen on hard times. There was horseradish that had taken over a large part of the plot. Well, in my naivete, and with my confidence far exceeding my knowledge, I volunteered to beat back the horseradish. The goal was to eradicate it completely, and with other volunteers we'd dig down about a foot, and just when we thought we'd won, the horseradish would come back. I also wasn't very good at planting, and mercifully, after a season or two, somebody volunteered to take over the leadership.



Later, Susan Davis and I were either co-managers or co-presidents for two or three years. She taught me so much about gardening and managing a garden. That was a pivotal time for RCCG, because the deer had arrived by then. There were no fences, and the deer were tromping all over the plots and eating the vegetables. There were also a lot of senior gardeners, and we all realized that they were frustrated because there were only two places to get water, and you had to string three or four hoses together. We were worried about losing our gardeners.

We organized around getting deer fencing, and that had to be designed and installed, and it took a lot of negotiation to get the Park Service to agree to what we wanted to do. Then we took on the problem of irrigation, and when I say "we," we were fortunate enough to have a carpenter-lawyer, Fritz Gibbon, and he volunteered his carpenter skills to design and organize crews to make doors and fence in our quadrants against the deer. Then we had Frank Carlman, who figured out and took the lead in installing the irrigation system. These two gardeners deserve a lot of credit for what we have today: a system that makes gardening so much easier and more successful.

Following that major step forward in our development as an organization and community, members of the Inspection Team was running into some problems over communications. [editorial comment: This was at least in part due to perceptions, rightly or wrongly, that the warnings meted out were either too stringent or dealt selectively.] By that time, I had quite a lot of experience managing people, so I stepped in to head the Inspection Committee. We made teams and a schedule, mixing seasoned gardeners with new ones. I thought of it as providing leadership development opportunities. And it's true, many of those "leaders" who stepped up became officers. I did that for a few years.

Since then though I haven't headed up a lot of things. But I do what I can to help. Yes, and over the years, I helped organize some of our social events, like the potlucks.

I believe that as the garden has grown we all continue to want to build community. I'd like to think the recently combined Flower and Herb Garden has been a tremendous success. I'm on the team led by Linda Haslach and Kathy Gallagher. They're both remarkable. Linda approaches herb gardening as a scientist and, as a gardener, she is in a whole other league.

I asked Peggy what has the garden and gardening meant to her.

Well, I find it surprising that the tables have turned, and now I find that I'm one of the seniors.

I love the garden and the people. I've had some health challenges, and the outpouring from people who have stepped up and helped me makes me so grateful.

What do you like growing in your own plot? And what do you hope for in seasons to come?

I've been experimenting with companion plants. I was having trouble with squash vine borers, so I planted turnips with my squash. My turnips got huge, but more importantly my pattypan squash has been producing like crazy. I always grow about fifteen kinds of lettuce and a whole bunch of greens, including swiss chard, kale, and Asian greens. I also grow shallots and leeks, the thin French variety and thick kind. I always experiment, last year with micro greens. I got back into rhubarb this year and parsel.

And in the future? I'm interested in learning more about hardier varieties, including tomatoes, that do better in our changing climate. I plan to do some study over the winter.

Well, Peggy, I hope you will share your discoveries in an article in our first newsletter of 2024!

Poetry Corner

Blue Moon

We just celebrated a Super Blue Moon on Wednesday night August 30 ("super" when the moon was "at perigree" with the earth. Put me in the mood to croon popular moon songs.

Did anybody snap a photo? Better yet, please share a picture of your favorite harvest vegetable or haul for our last newsletter of the season coming up in October.

Under the Harvest Moon

By Carl Sandburg

Under the harvest moon,
When the soft silver
Drips shimmering
Over the garden nights,
Death, the gray mocker,
Comes and whispers to you
As a beautiful friend
Who remembers.

Under the summer roses
When the flagrant crimson
Lurks in the dusk
Of the wild red leaves,
Love, with little hands,
Comes and touches you
With a thousand memories,
And asks you
Beautiful, unanswerable questions.