

RCCG NEWS

August 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.

August 9

August 23

September 6

September 20

October 4 (final inspection)

October 17 Garden Clean Up Day followed by Executive Committee walk through



RCCG President Update

A new arrangement for mowing with the National Park Service

Longtime gardeners may know that our garden's power equipment — a lawn mower, string trimmer, and roto tiller — and the fuel used to run it have been stored in the center shed for well over 45 years, likely dating back to when NPS budget cuts shifted day-to-day garden management to volunteer leadership in 1985. Over the decades, evolving OSHA and EPA rules around fuel storage on federal parkland caught up with a practice that had never been

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RCCG History

formally documented, even though it had always been done openly and with NPS's knowledge.

After productive conversations with Rock Creek Park's Superintendent, we're glad to share a good outcome: NPS has agreed to take over mowing of the garden perimeter and center area with their contract mowers going forward. The garden meanwhile retains use of our gasoline-powered string trimmer and roto tiller (the latter primarily for spring plot preparation only), we are working with the NPS to finalize limited fuel storage and fueling guidance while formal permit language is finalized. We're also exploring a longer-term move to electric equipment where feasible, though that's a project for future seasons, not this one.

We're grateful to NPS for working with us on a solution that keeps the garden running smoothly, and to the many volunteers who've kept our little corner of Rock Creek Park mowed and tended for nearly half a century. Questions about the new arrangement are always welcome — reach out to the Garden Manager or President anytime.

Water Update

We can expect more hot weather in August and longer spells between needed rain. You will likely need to water your plots almost every day. Those weeds are expecting your kind attention. Please be mindful to conserve water by directing the hose to the roots of your plants.

We made some minor repairs to leaky faucets and inspected kinky hoses. Understand that when watering, by stretching a hose to its full length (or trying to yank it past its full length) will only cause the faucet to weaken and leak. Recommend leaving one loop of hose on the hanger to prevent that. Also, please clean off the hose after use.

Report any issues to the water team – contact drgelderi@gmail.com

Fall Garden Starts Now: What to Plant

By Camilla Gagliolo

As the heat of summer begins to ease, many gardeners think the growing season is winding down. The arrival of fall doesn't mean the gardening season is over—it marks the beginning of one of the most enjoyable times to grow fresh vegetables. In reality, late summer is one of the best times to start a productive fall gardening our area. Our long, relatively mild autumn gives cool-season vegetables plenty of time to mature, often with fewer pests and improved flavor compared to spring crops.

Whether you're planting crisp lettuce for salads, sweet carrots, or hearty kale, a little effort now will reward you with delicious harvests throughout the autumn.

Why Plant a Fall Garden?

Many vegetables actually taste sweeter after they've experienced a light frost. Cooler temperatures also reduce stress on plants and slow down many insect pests that plague summer gardens. With a little planning, your garden can continue producing fresh vegetables well into November—and sometimes even through the winter with row covers.

What to Plant in Late July and August

These crops can be direct-seeded into the garden now:

Leafy Greens

- ✦ Lettuce
- ✦ Spinach
- ✦ Arugula
- ✦ Swiss chard
- ✦ Mustard greens
- ✦ Kale
- ✦ Collard greens

Leafy greens germinate best when soil temperatures cool slightly. During hot weather, keep the soil consistently moist and consider providing light afternoon shade until seedlings emerge.

Root Vegetables

- ✦ Carrots
- ✦ Parsnips
- ✦ Beets
- ✦ Radishes
- ✦ Turnips

Root crops develop excellent flavor in cool autumn weather. Loose, well-amended soil will produce the straightest roots.

Brassicas

Transplants work especially well for:

- ✦ Broccoli
- ✦ Cabbage
- ✦ Cauliflower
- ✦ Brussels sprouts

These crops appreciate cooler temperatures and often produce higher-quality heads in fall than they do in spring.



CROP	BEST TIME TO PLANT	DIRECT SEED OR TRANSPLANT	HARVEST
Arugula	Late July–September	Direct seed	30–45 days
Beets	Late July–Mid August	Direct seed	50–60 days
Bok Choy	Mid August–September	Direct seed or transplant	40–50 days
Broccoli	Late July–Mid August	Transplants	October–November
Brussels Sprouts	Late July	Transplants	November–December
Cabbage	Late July–Mid August	Transplants	October–November
Carrots	Late July–Mid August	Direct seed	60–80 days
Cauliflower	Late July–Early August	Transplants	October
Cilantro	August–September	Direct seed	30–45 days
Collard Greens	August	Direct seed or transplant	October–December
Dill	August–September	Direct seed	40–60 days
Kale	August	Direct seed or transplant	October–December (improves after frost)
Lettuce	August–September	Direct seed or transplants	30–60 days
Mustard Greens	August–September	Direct seed	30–45 days
Parsley	August	Transplants or direct seed	Fall–early winter
Radishes	August–September	Direct seed	25–35 days
Spinach	Late August–September	Direct seed	40–50 days
Swiss Chard	August	Direct seed or transplant	October–November
Turnips	August–September	Direct seed	45–60 days

MONTHLY GARDEN CHECKLIST

LATE JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
- Remove spent spring and early summer crops. - Add 2–3 inches of compost to planting beds. - Start broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and Brussels sprout transplants. - Sow carrots, beets, and the first round of leafy greens.	- Prime planting month for most fall vegetables. - Keep seedbeds evenly moist during hot weather. - Mulch to conserve moisture and reduce soil temperatures. - Watch for cabbage worms and flea beetles.	- Continue planting lettuce, spinach, arugula, radishes, and Asian greens. - Harvest summer tomatoes and peppers while nurturing fall crops. - Begin succession harvests of leafy greens.	- Harvest broccoli, cabbage, kale, carrots, and beets. - Protect crops during cold nights with floating row covers. - Plant garlic for next summer's harvest.	- Continue harvesting kale, collards, carrots, spinach, and Brussels sprouts. - Plant cover crops such as crimson clover or winter rye in empty beds. - Clean and store garden tools before winter.

DC GARDENER'S TIP Many fall vegetables become sweeter after a light frost. Kale, collards, carrots, and Brussels sprouts convert starches to sugars as temperatures drop, producing their best flavor of the year.

Herbs

Don't forget herbs that enjoy cooler weather:

- ✦ Cilantro
- ✦ Parsley
- ✦ Dill
- ✦ Chervil

These herbs often bolt quickly in spring but thrive during the fall season.

September Planting

As temperatures continue to moderate, September is perfect for another round of:

- ✦ Lettuce
- ✦ Spinach
- ✦ Arugula
- ✦ Radishes
- ✦ Asian greens such as bok choy and tatsoi

Successive plantings every two to three weeks will keep fresh salads coming throughout the fall.

*Prepare Your Garden for Success***Before planting:**

Remove spent summer crops and weeds.

Add compost to replenish nutrients.

Water deeply before sowing seeds.

Apply mulch to conserve moisture and moderate soil temperatures.

Keep newly planted seeds consistently moist until germination.

A Few Tips

- ✦ Watch your first frost date—typically around late October to early November—but remember that many cool-season crops tolerate light frosts with little or no damage.
- ✦ Floating row covers can extend your harvest by several weeks (or even over the winter)
- ✦ Continue harvesting regularly to encourage leafy greens to keep producing.
- ✦ Water consistently during dry autumn periods, especially while plants are becoming established.

Happy Fall Gardening!

Featured Gardeners - Brian Heilmann

By Susan Galbraith

When did you become a member of our RCCG community?

Well, I looked around at different local community gardens and had my name on the waiting list for about five years - maybe 2019. In the meantime, I also tried a little gardening at home, but I was frustrated by the shade from a great old oak. We have two kids who attended DC public schools and have lived in the neighborhood since 1999. I was invited to join about three years ago.

Was gardening a part of your background growing up?

I grew up in California, and gardening was a part of my childhood. We had maybe a quarter or a third of an acre in a former peach orchard that had been converted. I've met several people here with similar stories.



It's great to see the quality of one's soil improve with a little amending and tending. I think about the historical Massachusetts Bay Colony and what they had to do to survive.

And how have you found are community so far?

Well I didn't know some of my neighbors' garden— like Sheli Meyer and Thierry. Then it's been great meeting people like Rima. There are so many people from different walks of life and from different parts of the world, representing different cultures and cuisines too.

And I learn so much from our kids too. My daughter especially is very particular about what she eats. She like things to be carefully grown and carefully prepared, organic everything, and she encouraged me to try kale especially. Well, she loves it more than anyone else in the family. I was on the Inspection Committee the first year and learned a lot. I'm still not as diligent about weeding as I should be, but I am grateful for the reminders. I've been blessed joining the community and being part of it. And there are so many stories about this being Victory Garden. My grandfather had one in San Diego, and that side of the family had emigrated from Ukraine before Ukraine was Ukraine. And I have a brother who keeps bees.

So why do you garden? Everyone has different reasons, yes?

Indeed. When I think about human history, my own connection is that gardening and farming are an essential part of us and what make us human. When I was growing up, I knew someone from "the old country." He was from Calabresi and would only eat fruit off the tree. There's something magical about that, I think – to know that you grew your own fruit and could eat it fresh. So, for me, it's being able to know when something is ready to eat and enjoy it. Also, something about sustenance, and maybe something based in fear—what do we know about what we put in our bodies? How far has our civilization moved away from basics and how does that impact our well-being?

And what is in your garden?

This year I rotated and that seemed to help. So far, I've planted beets, heirloom carrots which I let go to seed because I find the foliage so pretty, kale red onion, okra, rutabagas – I love their sweet nuttiness—

although I needed to thin them more to give them room to grow, cucumbers, zucchini and yellow squash, and eggplant. My peppers haven't done terribly well this year. My tomatoes are doing pretty well. I've got flowers like dahlias and I love Mexican sunflowers. But I'm not disciplined about identifying when it's time to pull things up.

And what do you do when you're not gardening?

For years I was in international banking and I lived in Japan for four years. Now I'm working with a group doing commercial solar energy, a group called Surge out of Colorado. And I'm trying to keep up with the younger generation in our family and do a little traveling. I've traveled a lot in Asia and am particularly fascinated by that part of the world that understands water and irrigation. My wife is originally from the Punjab, and I've learned a lot from her. I like to garden, and she likes to cook. We both like good food.

See some of Brian's favorite Recipes in this Newsletter.

Recipe Corner

Roasted Rutabaga in Brown Butter

By Brian Heilmann

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large rutabaga, about 1 1/2 pounds
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Flaky salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oven to 450°F. Peel the rutabaga with a vegetable peeler and cut into 1/2-inch to 3/4-inch cubes.
2. Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat and cook for about 5 minutes, until the butter foams then browns into a nutty, toasty-smelling liquid.
3. Toss the rutabaga with the browned butter and season with salt and pepper. Transfer the rutabaga to a large baking sheet and spread into a single layer. Roast for 25 to 40 minutes or until browned and tender. Remove from the baking sheet and toss with lemon juice and parsley.

Tomato Gratin

From Cook's Illustrated - America's Test Kitchen

Serves 6-8

For the best results, use the ripest in-season tomatoes you can find. Supermarket vine-ripened tomatoes will work, but the gratin won't be as flavorful as one made with locally grown tomatoes. Do not use plum tomatoes, which contain less juice than regular round tomatoes and will result in a dry gratin. For the bread, we prefer a crusty baguette with a firm, chewy crumb. You can serve the gratin hot, warm, or at room temperature.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 ounces crusty baguette, cut into 3/4-inch cubes (4 cups)
- 3 garlic cloves, sliced thin
- 3 pounds tomatoes, cored and cut into 3/4-inch pieces
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1½ ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (3/4 cup)
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Heat ¼ cup oil in 12-inch oven-safe skillet over medium-low heat until shimmering. Add bread and stir to coat. Cook, stirring constantly, until bread is browned and toasted, about 5 minutes. Transfer bread to bowl.
2. Return now-empty skillet to low heat and add remaining 2 tablespoons oil and garlic. Cook, stirring constantly, until garlic is golden at edges, 30 to 60 seconds. Add tomatoes, sugar, salt, and pepper and stir to combine. Increase heat to medium-high and cook, stirring occasionally, until tomatoes have started to break down and have released enough juice to be mostly submerged, 8 to 10 minutes.
3. Remove skillet from heat and gently stir in 3 cups bread until completely moistened and evenly distributed. Using spatula, press down on bread until completely submerged. Arrange remaining 1 cup bread evenly over surface, pressing to partially submerge. Sprinkle evenly with Parmesan.
4. Bake until top of gratin is deeply browned, tomatoes are bubbling, and juice has reduced, 40 to 45 minutes; after 30 minutes, run spatula around edge of skillet to loosen crust and release any juice underneath. (Gratin will appear loose and jiggle around outer edges but will thicken as it cools.)
5. Remove skillet from oven and let stand for 15 minutes. Sprinkle gratin with basil and serve.



Zucchini Lasagne

Shared by Brian Heilmann

INGREDIENTS

- Parmigiano Reggiano (fresh parmesan)
- Zucchini (yellow or green)
- mozzarella (low moisture)
- ricotta
- garlic cloves, fresh basil, fresh oregano
- egg
- marinara sauce.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Slice the zucchini into thin noodles using a mandoline or sharp knife (1/8-inch thick)
- Remove excess moisture by salting the zucchini slices, letting them sit for 10 minutes, then pre-baking at 375°F for 10 minutes
- Make the ricotta filling by mixing ricotta, parmesan, garlic, egg, and fresh herbs
- Layer the lasagna starting with marinara sauce, then zucchini noodles, ricotta mixture, fresh herbs, and mozzarella cheese (repeat layers)
- Bake uncovered at 375°F for 40-45 minutes, then broil on HIGH for 1 minute until the cheese is golden brown



Living on the Wild Side of Chevy Chase and Rock Creek Park

The Heart and Soul of the Chevy Chase Community Garden

by Yvonne Davis-Smith

Before Oregon Avenue was Oregon Avenue, it was Daniel Road. And in 1936, at 5744 Daniel Road, a man named Salvind Olson built himself a house out of stone.

Mr. Salvind Olson was born near the turn of the century, and he was still living in that house when my family moved into this neighborhood in 1977. He is also the reason a good many of us know the Rock Creek Garden at all: the plots had gone unattended for years before he took them up and revived the garden program, and it was Mr. Olson who first walked my own family down there and showed them what it could be.

Ninety years after he laid the first stone, that house now belongs to Christopher Ritzert, a successful real-estate executive and only the third owner the property has ever had. This month I sat down with Chris to hear what it is to live on the wild side of Chevy Chase.

Two lines in the Washington Post

Chris did not arrive as a stranger. His grandparents lived here in Chevy Chase DC, and he spent much of his childhood in their house; he went to Lafayette Elementary School. His mother, his grandmother for a while, Mother and grandmother lived in Chevy Chase, DC, and all called this community home.

Grown, and living in a townhouse on the Southwest Waterfront with his brother Tim, he set out to find a house of his own. What he found was a two-line classified in the Washington Post in 1999: Chevy Chase DC, stone house, on park, garage, three bedrooms. That was the whole of it.

He came in through the front door and he knew. “I said This is my house,” he told me, “Before I even got too far in previewing the home.”

Understanding exactly what he means takes no time at all. Opening the door to his home, you get the feeling of walking into a unique place — the Carderock stone, the extraordinary fireplace built from that same stone arches, and original unpainted woodwork. Not one brick in it.

That house is stone and slate. There is not one brick or block in it. Go down to the basement and you see stone; the walls are thick, the foundation solid, and there is not another house on this road like it. The two-car garage standing free at the back is stone as well.

Chris has kept faith with it. When the windows wanted attention, he did not put in new ones — he had the originals taken out, reinforced and restored, and they are gorgeous. His object was to keep the house in the spirit Mr. Olson intended when he had it designed it and lived in it, and every improvement since was chosen to complement that design. The blueprints reproduced with this issue show precisely what he has been working from.

The garden, and the wild side

Behind the house is a garden worth the walk: roses climbing pergolas, shade gardens, a perimeter of native shrubs for screening and privacy, terraces stepping down in three tiers, and multiple water fountains, some of which spouts out of a dragon’s mouth. When Chris bought the place, vines swallowed the whole of it — the pergola where grapes once grew disappeared entirely — and the New Dawn roses had canes on them the size of your leg.

Ask him where he lives and he will tell you: the wild side of Chevy Chase. Not Connecticut Avenue. Not Wisconsin Avenue. We are on the wild side over here; we are not on the curated side — and that is the enchantment of Rock Creek Park entirely. The foxes, the coyotes, the raccoons, the deer at breakfast. Chris photographed a fox sitting at his own front door one morning while he was making his coffee.

Virgin soil

Where his house stands there was once a large apple orchard, and this ground has never been turned over the way most city soil has been. It is virgin soil. Visits across the way to Tim’s and Dymphna’s home is now a short cut through a great fence that allows great conversations and convenience.

Les and Judy Sotsky lived in the big red house across the street before they moved to Florida. The ambiance of Rock Creek Park permeates throughout this community. We have the park-like — the farm-like — ambiance of the place, and we are living very close to urban amenities all the same. This is not a small thing, and it is not an accident.

This was an extraordinary interview, and I gained valuable information concerning the legacy of Chevy Chase and Rock Creek Park. My deepest appreciation to Chris for sitting with me — and for the delicious Chardonnay!!

More on our RCCG pre-history

Peggy shared this fabulous story with Rima about RCCG before it was RCCG, before we had critter fencing, when Mr. Olson was the garden manager and a character at that. I commend the story to you. I have made it a gift article, so I hope everyone is able to open and read it. Here is the [link](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)

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Bounty Cheer in the Garden

Always nice to take a stroll through our entire community garden. On an end of month walk, I espied with my little eyes in a plot bordering the meadow, some corn shooting up to the sky more than eight feet –spectacular! In the same row, on a trellis, I saw some purplish gem squash. native to South Africa. Our South African gardening colleagues swear they are so tender, one “can eat them, skin, pips and all.”

Near the Oregon Street side of the garden, I spied Cuban oregano. It is delicious. We are blessed indeed with our international community of gardeners.

After the heat and the rain tomatoes have come into full season – and so have the weeds! Most of our gardeners have a handle on it. But here are some reminders:

- Harvest ripe tomatoes and don't let them rot, which can attract pests.
- After a heavy rainfall, check for standing water, and don't host a breeding ground for mosquitos.
- Harlequin beetles seem to be in abundance. Declare WAR! Take no prisoners!



Poetry Corner

Here's a verse or two from the Lyrics from Lost in the Stars by composer Kurt Weill and Lyricist Maxwell Anderson, a mezzo soprano sings

Who'll Buy

Who'll buy my juicy rutabagas?

Who'll buy my yellow corn?

Who'll try asparagus or carrots or potatoes?

Who wants my peppers and my ginger and tomatoes—?

The best you bit into since you been born

If you want to make a supper dish fit for a king,'

Look over what I offer, I offer everything.

Try my, buy my black-eyed peas.

The Garden of Eden had nothing like these.

You'll feel like flying like a bird on the wing.

You'll stay up there like a kite on string....

Try my, buy my, oh,my...