

RCCG NEWS

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2025 Fall Clean Up Day

Sunday, October 19 2025

Inspection Date

Sunday, October 19th

****Last inspection; will be conducted by your executive Committee**



Message from RCCG President Joe Nelson

Thank you for being part of the garden community for another nice season. For me it was a long season with some frustrations. I had trouble getting plants to germinate from seed (maybe my seed stock was too old) but once they did the growing season and harvest seemed unusually long. Cucumbers where my usual frustrating 3-5 fruits and then died off. I did have some very lovely bright purple eggplants which made excellent Shakshuka and my tomatoes are still going. As always, each season is learning experience for me. Thanks to those who volunteered including our inspection team, water team and others. The potluck was a wonderful event and we look forward to wrapup for the season. In terms of clean up and stopping gardening, people have reached out worried about when they would have to stop and the answer is, you don't. If you have the skill and desire you can garden well into the fall. There is another article here that gives some tips. We do ask that when you decide to finish, please tidy up, remove debris, weed, and pull any plants that aren't wintering over. Looking forward to seeing you into the fall or next season.

**PRESIDENTS
MESSAGE**

Joe Nelson

NEWS
Committees

FALL GARDEN

Joe Nelson and
Anita Albertson

**FEATURED
GARDENER**

Thys Van Schalk

**POETRY
CORNER**

Susan Galbraith

Water Team Final Report

In September the Water Team installed two new faucets just down the slope from the picnic table. The one at the corner of the lower plots has a hose for garden watering. The 2nd faucet closer to the meadow with the short hose is intended for public use and has dog bowl next to it.

The new red spigot next to the picnic table is the main spigot for the lower plots. No need to mess with it now - Just keep it open. When the water is shut off at all the other hoses this fall, there will be a temporary hose for public use over the winter.



Important Fall Dates Coming up

October 19 - Official Garden Clean Up and Hose Put Away

October 19 - Final Inspection - This year, for something new, the final inspection will be done by the entire Executive Committee! It will serve as a preliminary assessment of who will get warning letters and who will be told that they are essentially being informed of eviction from the garden and will enter the eviction process. We are wishing everyone well and a good clean end to the season.

Reminder of RCCG Community Garden Practice

By Anita Albertson

A. Garden plots shall primarily be used as vegetable gardens. However, up to 25 percent of each garden plot can be planted with native flowers as companion plantings to attract pollinators and other beneficial insects.

B. Perennials, trees, shrubs, and woody-stemmed plants (including rose bushes) are not allowed to be planted without written authorization from the Rock Creek Park Superintendent.

Pictures from the field trip to Longwood Gardens in Garden in PA

Saturday, September 20th



Featured Gardener - Thys Van Schalk

Every time I interview a gardener for our newsletter, I marvel at the wonderful people drawn to our Rock Creek Garden community. This summer I got to know Thys (pronounced Tace) part of the Water Crew, led by Frank Carlman, who gathered a team of worker bees to begin the job of repairing and expanding the capacity of our RCCG's water system. Thys only joined the garden this summer but he pitched right in and has made himself a favorite friend to many.

Thys: that's the wonderful thing about the garden, there are so many ways to meet people, and I never thought this would turn out to be such a community as it actually is. We saw that with the George Mason people who came to do the study project. And yet our community is not intrusive. For the most part, people can do their own thing, but people are friendly and will offer to help, sharing produce or tips. There's a nice balance between individualism and community responsibility. And it's very well managed. Everything is well maintained. The sheds are tidy. The process works well.

I am curious to learn about your early days growing up in South Africa, and if gardening was a part of your childhood?

Thys: We had a big garden in the capital city of Pretoria, and my mother was a fairly keen gardener. The extent of my involvement, along with my brother, is we had to mow the lawn. The real gardening/ farming experience came from my grandfather. He was a university professor but on the side he had a ranch about three hours out of town, and he farmed with cattle, peanuts, alfalfa. We generally would go in the winter when it wasn't so hot. And he otherwise lived on a small holding just outside of Pretoria, and there he had chickens and supplied eggs and milk, and we would pick corn for dinner, and he had a lot of fruit trees.

And what made you jump across the ocean?

Thys: I think it's genetic. Three of my brothers came to this country to study, and two of them married Americans. Then I came to study at Georgetown for my Master's degree in the early 80's then went back to South Africa and taught at a university. But I wanted to get a PhD in international political economy, so I came back and went to study in South Carolina. As a White male at that time, however, there were no jobs of that kind, so then I quickly did a Library degree and worked for a bit at the Library of Congress. But then I fell into a job that was made for me at George Mason University with some teaching thrown in.

And how did you discover RCCG?

Well my neighbor, Frank Carlman, sort of volunteered me. And I was happy to help. And when he and his family went away on vacation in August, he has had me take care of his garden.

Well, I think we are lucky to have you join us. You are an amazingly passionate and knowledgeable gardener. Do you and Jeff share in the gardening? And what do you like to grow?

Thys: Well, Jeff is the cleaner upper and the cutter downer. He and I have a garden where we live, just down the road, which we've been doing for many years, and we get some successes and some not.

Is it microclimates or dirt?

Thys: Both. And sometimes it comes down to luck. I was on the wait list three or four years. Meanwhile the squirrels and chipmunks kept attacking my tomatoes at home, even with fencing. And I was very irritated especially by the squirrels who take just one bite of a beautifully ripe tomato and move on to the next one. And I've discovered I can grow things in my RCCG plot I can't easily grow at home. Besides tomatoes, I love growing chard in my plot here, and spinach

Do you grow things that we would not get here in the mid-Atlantic?

There was a pole bean that I grew up with called "Lazy Housewife," a broad flat bean like a Roma flat bean, and it's delicious, like butter almost. So I got a packet of seeds and planted them, but I didn't have much success at first, possibly there was too much Nitrogen in the soil, and beans are Nitrogen fixers. I had a green forest of leaves but very few beans. I learned what they need is Potassium. This year, they came late, in September, but the harvest has been incredible. You steam them for three minutes. And they're just gorgeous.

And Frank talks about your cooking. Please share a recipe or two. And indeed he has.

Easy Zucchini and Pasta

Recipe Corner

(Adapted from The Smitten Kitchen). This recipe is very forgiving and can be adapted to include other vegetables such as peppers, mushrooms, or the like; as well as leftover meat or sausage. But simply as is it makes the summer squash flavor.

Ingredients

- Butter and olive oil (about 2 tablespoons)
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- A few garlic cloves, to taste, minced
- About 1lb zucchini, grated on the large holes of a box grater or in the food processor
- Pepper flakes
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- Grated cheese, about ¼ to ½ cup, to taste: Parmesan, Pecorino, Asiago or cheddar, or a mix
- ½ lb pasta – long, thin noodles are best, eg spaghetti, spaghettini or linguine
- Plenty thinly sliced fresh basil leaves

Directions

- Boil pasta till desired consistency and drain, reserve one cup of the cooking water.
- Meanwhile, in a large skillet, melt butter and add olive oil over medium heat. Sauté onion, stirring, until translucent and starting to brown slightly. Add minced garlic and cook until fragrant.
- Add zucchini and stir, increasing heat to medium high. Add a good dash of salt. The squash will start to release juices. Keep stirring until the squash becomes soft, starts to color and juices evaporate. (At this stage you could add a splash of dry white wine or dry vermouth for some acidity.) Keep stirring intermittently until the mixture becomes almost jammy.
- Add about 1/3 cup of the reserved cooking water and then the cooked pasta. Toss well. Mix in some grated cheese to taste, freshly ground black pepper, as well as a handful of the basil chiffonade. Toss again. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary.
- Serve, topping with additional cheese and basil.

Fall Gardening tips

By Joe Nelson (with some help from mother internet)

Start fall crops in late summer (July–September) while soil is still warm. Some quick growing plants, like mustard, radish, and arugula might still grow a bit later or you can always look for seedlings at American Plant or other garden store if you get a late start. As usual try planting every 2-3 weeks so you have continuous harvests. Lastly many people plant garlic as late as thanksgiving if the soil is still workable.

Protect Plants from Cold

Depending on how late you want to extend the season you can use the following methods for keeping plants going as the weather turns colder.

- Simple mulch (straw, leaves) Insulates roots and soil warms about, +2–4°F best for root crops, overwintering garlic
- Use Row covers / floating fabric. This is lightweight cloth that traps heat, it can raise the base temp by +2–5°F and is best for Greens, carrots, herbs
- Low tunnels (hoops + plastic). This basically a mini greenhouses over rows. Gives you about +5–10°F and is best for Lettuce, kale, beets
- Cold frames. These are clear-topped boxes using sunlight and translucent plexi "windows". This can get you +10–20°F and is best for Spinach, herbs, seedlings. These require a bit more attention during warm and sunny days as the cover needs to be adjusted to ensure the plants don't overheat.

You can combine methods (e.g., row cover inside a cold frame) for extra protection during deep winter. Nice thing about these methods is you can have them do double duty to get started earlier in the spring.

What are the best Fall & Winter Crops?

These thrive in cooler temperatures — some even get sweeter after frost due to sugar concentration.

Greens:

Lettuce, Kale (especially 'Winterbor' or 'Red Russian'), Spinach ('Bloomsdale', 'Giant Winter'), Swiss chard, Arugula, Mustard Greens, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Brussel Sprouts, Kohlrabi, and Cabbage.

As an aside I only hear about Mache, Claytonia but I'd love to hear from someone about growing these and recipes

Root vegetables:

- Carrots, Beets, Turnips, Rutabagas, Radishes, and Parsnips (supposedly best after repeated freezes)
- Onions/ Alliums:
- Garlic (plant in fall for spring/summer harvest), Onions (multiplier, overwintering types)

Herbs:

Parsley, chives, and thyme tolerate light frost. Cilantro likes cooler weather.

Overwintering Strategies:

Hardy greens like kale or spinach can survive under cover into spring. Root crops (carrots, parsnips) can be left in the ground under thick mulch and harvested as needed. Garlic and shallots should be planted in fall and harvested the following summer.

Poetry Corner - Ode to Autumn

By John Keats (shared by Susan Galbraith)

1. Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
 For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.
2. Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
 Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
 Thou watchest the last oozy hours by hours.
3. Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river sallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

Winterizing Your Garden Plot

by Anita Albertson

It is almost that time – the garden is getting less sun, the air and soil temperatures are cooling, many things are getting ready to be harvested or have begun to go to seed.

Each year I ask myself – what can I do now that will maximize the health of my soil and at the same time minimize the weeds that will greet me on the other side of the new year in the next gardening season?

Harvest

All remaining things you might want to eat – green tomatoes and peppers can still ripen in your home, Greens, mint, etc. can be frozen.

Remove

- **Throw into the Garbage any diseased or infested plants – DO NOT compost these!**
- **Decapitate your garlic chives!** - Do NOT let those seeds create next year's carpet!
- **Pick up your cherry tomatoes and any flowered/fruited things that are apt to reseed themselves *if you want to control them.*** - Reseeding things you intend to come back is fine! Many of us do that with our Kale!
- Take seeds home to dry them out and save them to replant next year. There are added benefits if they come from your own plot (or a neighbor's) – something I read about it helps the seeds optimize for your soil/climate.
- **Weed** so that you have minimized next year's crop of unwanted plants.
- **Pull the dead plants you don't want. Cut back the plants you intend to keep in smaller measure.** Much of this can be revisited in the spring – removing the dead bits and thinning out the bulbs or plants in the Spring.

Compost

- **Compost what you can** – *but if it has seeds – or was diseased – or could potentially harbor things like harlequin beetles, other pests like squash bore beetles or mildew – take them out of your garden and DON'T Compost them in your plot.*
- **Add Aged compost to your soil – as much as 3 or more inches of it!**
- **Layer mulch on top of the compost.** The best is shredded leaves – they are free and plentiful! They will retain some water and create a blanket for your soil. They suppress weeds and also prevent some of the seeds that go airborne from landing and seeding in your plot. Further - Spreading shredded leaves, cardboard, mulch, compost and/or straw throughout your plot can enhance the components that will enrich your soil - and therefore - your plants next spring. Things like leaves, wood chips and cardboard do a few contradictory things – while they do enrich the soil and create a complex, rich biodiversity; they can also slow down some processes – and use/take nutrients like nitrogen as they break down. Do a bit of your own research to be sure that you are aware of the positive and temporary negative consequences of what you use and how it works.

Protect

- **Research your plants** like Dahlias that benefit from being protected from the harsh cold of winter. In some cases, people lift the tubers and store them in their garages/basements – others cover them deeply with soil and warm straw or compost.
- **Protect plants like strawberries with straw or leaves for the winter.**
- **Don't prune canes or trees until they are fully dormant**, otherwise you can harm the plant by stimulating growth just before the frost.
- **Bring inside any herbs or potted vegetables** like peppers that you want to survive the cold and replant them in the spring.

Uncover/Recover/Cover - Barriers

- **If you have a covered plot with fabric cloth or plastic** – I strongly suggest you uncover it for the winter so that air, water, sunlight, nutrients can get into the soil. Yes, you might end up with some weeds – but these hermetically sealed soils are being depleted of their nutrients and while you are minimizing the weeds, you are also minimizing the nutrients that help your next crop be robust and nutritious.
- **I strongly suggest you re-cover the areas with brown (unbleached) cardboard covered with mulch** – leaves, compost, straw. This will both feed your soil and the critters that keep your soil healthy AND it will keep down some of the sunlight so that you aren't overwrought with weeds. Sure - it won't be completely devoid of a few pesky weeds – but it will be manageable and healthier for your efforts.

Cover Crops

Consider planting a cover crop that might enrich your soil and prevent other weeds from taking over. I've had mixed experience with this – I tried oats and peas – the oats never really did much – which might have been okay since it might have been too dense and hard to remove. Peas on the other hand I had a decent experience with – by planting peas in the fall they didn't do a whole lot in the winter, but in the Spring they came into their own and I had a decent crop. In the meantime, they were supposedly providing my plot with nutrients!

Winter Crops

- Cruciferous plants (broccoli, cabbage, kale, radishes etc.) and salad greens, mache (corn salad), arugula, etc., can do well enough over the winter and into early Spring. Conduct an experiment!
- provided you aren't harboring the dreaded, yet colorful, harlequin beetles (fancy dressed stink bugs...) If you find you are being visited by them – use soapy water to drown them and or squish them. If they fall to the ground consider using diatomaceous earth. (Food Grade Diatomaceous earth (DE) powder is a natural, non-toxic insecticide and filter aid made from the fossilized remains of microscopic algae called diatoms. Its fine powder has razor-sharp microscopic edges that physically cut and abrade the waxy outer layer of insects' exoskeletons, causing them to lose moisture, dehydrate, and die. While effective against many pests, it is essential to use food-grade DE for any applications involving humans, pets, or gardens and to avoid inhaling the dust, as it can be a respiratory irritant.)

- Plant garlic!