



# **Rock Creek Community Garden Association**

## **NEW GARDENER INFORMATION**

The Rock Creek Community Garden is a membership organization, located on National Park Service property at the site of a 1940's Victory Garden. We rely exclusively on volunteer gardener-members for our operations.

There are approximately 130 members, not including co-gardeners (generally spouses or other helpers).

The Association makes plots available to new members from a waiting list that it maintains. Typically, the largest number of plots become available in late winter and early spring.

Most members, including all new members, have single plots that are generally roughly 10'x20'.

*Dues.* The Garden is funded by the collection of member dues of \$15 per single plot per year. The Garden budget is spent primarily to maintain for member use a large variety of hand tools, gas-powered tillers, mowing equipment, repairs and supplies for garden infrastructure such as fencing and irrigation, to maintain the garden web page, and to pay for insurance required by the NPS permit. There is also, for new members, a \$25 deposit that is refundable when you leave the garden.

*Tool sheds.* There are three storage sheds -- one for hand tools, one for hoses and the mower, and one for tillers (and gas storage). The sheds are kept locked, and it is everyone's responsibility to make sure they stay locked when not in use. If you unlock a shed, be sure it is locked before you leave. And if you see an unlocked shed when you are leaving the garden, please either lock it or make sure someone else plans to do so before they leave.

*Water.* Water is provided by the NPS through two main hose bibs (orange), one outside the garden (by the asphalt path) and another in the interior meadow. The water at these two hose bibs stays on all year. The Garden has constructed an internal water distribution system from these bibs that connects them to spigots in various areas of the garden, closer to various plots. Use care when weeding in your path as the water is distributed via a system of PVC pipe that is laid in a fairly shallow trench below the surface, and the pipes can be cut accidentally by a shovel. During Spring Cleanup, hoses are distributed and connected to the spigots. During Fall Cleanup, the hoses are emptied and stored for the winter. At that point, until the spring, the internal system is shut off and water is only available at the NPS hose bibs.

*Schedule.* The Executive Committee sets the organizational schedule during a winter meeting. The schedule typically starts with returning members sending in their application and dues in late January or early February; an annual meeting in March; Spring Cleanup in April; and Fall Cleanup in October. The clean-ups also involve some measure of picnicking! Spring Cleanup also includes the distribution of soil amendments (mulch, manure, straw, etc.) that are made as a bulk discounted purchase. The order form is distributed by email and you will be asked to send the form and payment for your purchases to the volunteer who is organizing the purchase. The Spring and Fall Cleanups typically also include a bulk trash pickup. Organic and non-organic waste must be separated and organic waste must be

collected in paper leaf bags. At all other times, you are responsible for removing your own trash. The Park Police are alert to dumping in the meadow or woods and any dumping by individual gardeners puts an onus on other community members to clean up after them. We can get fined or in other trouble with the NPS for trash issues or dumping in the nearby woods.

*Overall Layout; fencing.* Each plot is labeled according to a grid system, with the rows parallel to Oregon Avenue labeled from AA-G, starting from Oregon Avenue, and the rows parallel to Horse Stable Road (the road/parking area) labeled from 1-10, starting at the parking area. The plots are generally configured into “quadrants” based on the paths. (There are more than four, we still call them quadrants.) Each quadrant is surrounded by tall deer fencing that was installed in the early 2000s, when the deer population in the Park was large and hungry. The deer have declined in number since then, but are still around and in recent years have been joined by a proliferation of rabbits. As a result, we now require gardeners to install black rubber-coated metal fencing along the bottom of their quadrant fencing to deter rabbits from entering. (The use of black fencing is a Park Service requirement.) Quadrant fencing, including the gate you use to enter your plot, is generally the individual gardener’s responsibility to maintain, but you may request assistance from the volunteer fencing crew. Quadrant fencing is critical to keeping critters away, so inspections focus on making sure it’s secure to the ground and solid. Interior fencing inside the quadrant is optional and completely the gardener’s responsibility, although we recommend consulting and collaborating with your neighbor gardeners to determine the extent of desire for fencing, mostly to prevent rabbits and deer from going into adjacent plots. In addition to the provisions in the rules regarding structures, trees, and trellises, gardeners should not use any cement to set posts.

There is a community plot for flowers and herbs that is maintained for all members to access. The herb and flower garden is kept locked using the same combination as for the tool sheds. Near the sheds, there is a picnic area that you should feel free to enjoy.

*Chips; compost.* There is usually a mound of wood chips by the picnic area (provided by the NPS, upon request from the Garden Manager) that should be used to maintain the path next to your plot and may be used as ground cover in your garden. If you compost in your plot, please make sure to compost only garden vegetation and turn it regularly, preferably once or twice monthly to speed up the decomposition process and to discourage the nesting of voles, moles, snakes and wasps. Do not use your compost bin for trash, and unless it is sealed, do not use it for kitchen waste. The garden is near the woods and we have mice, rats, moles/voles and the snakes that follow them into the garden. A poorly managed, open compost bin is a magnet for all manner of pests.

The National Park Police horse stables at the top of the road have manure that is available for free. If you have the stamina to shovel it out and bring it down to the garden, you can use the garden wheelbarrows, but please don’t leave the wheelbarrows at the stables. The manure is heavy with grass and may be “hot,” so gardeners typically prefer to set it over their soil in the fall to give it time to cool the winter before plowing it into their soil.

*Inspections.* Inspections are a necessity to keep us aligned with the National Park Service guidelines, as we are only tenants on Park Service land, and remind us of our RCCGA garden rules. We all have the responsibility to our fellow gardeners not to create nuisances or more work for others by lack of care for our own plots. Inspections are conducted by volunteer fellow gardeners on a bi-weekly schedule beginning the first Sunday in May through October. All new gardeners are required to serve on the Inspections Committee for at least one year at the beginning of their membership. The maintenance and condition of each garden is evaluated and the results are then emailed to the gardener.

Notices are green. Citations are red. Notices are to alert and advise the gardener about a plot condition that requires their attention; a single notice is punitive, but ignoring it or receiving multiple notices can lead to a citation. A citation indicates a serious violation of garden rules. An excessive number of notices or citations can lead to being put on a “watch list” and eventual eviction from the garden. *See* Garden Rules for more information about inspections.

*Resources.* Our website offers various types of information from the history of victory gardens to tips on gardening, weeding, pests, plants, and recipes from the garden. It is also where you will find the member directory, by-laws, garden rules and guidelines. The RCCGA newsletter is another great way we keep our RCCGA community informed. The newsletter is issued monthly beginning in April through October.

*Safety.* The garden is generally safe, but there is occasional theft of tools and produce, so it is important to lock the sheds if you are the last one in the garden and keep an eye out for your fellow gardeners’ safety. Given our urban surroundings, especially if you are the second to last person leaving around dusk—let whoever is in the garden know they are alone. If you drive to the garden, you should lock your car, as there have been (rarely) cars that have had windows broken and been rifled through. Leave nothing visible, wallets or purses. The National Park Service police will respond to any emergency and are generally close by and do patrol the area (the stables are for their police horses). 911 will not work for the garden, since it is in a national park. The police phone number is posted on the garden bulletin board, and you can put it in your cell phone: **Call 202-610-7500 for emergencies**; the non-emergency number is 202-426-7717. Please keep the garden leadership posted of any issues you encounter using the garden email: [rockcreekgarden@gmail.com](mailto:rockcreekgarden@gmail.com).

There also have been cases of Lyme disease reported by gardeners and ticks are prevalent at certain times of year in the pasture area. Peak time for Lyme disease is summer through fall and it’s safe to assume ticks bearing the disease may be in our garden thanks to tick-bearing deer that frequently travel through our garden. It’s highly recommended that you dress appropriately, take precautions, and check frequently for ticks.

*Elections; officers.* The Executive Committee and officers are elected for one-year terms at the Annual Meeting in the spring. The Executive Committee includes the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, Garden Manager, Inspection Manager and two or more at-large members. Various other leadership opportunities include working on or leading committees: Volunteer, Inspection, Fencing, Mowing, Flower Garden, Herb Garden, Invasive Weeds and Communications. The organization’s articles and bylaws are available on request, as well as posted on the garden website.

*Backup gardeners and absences from the garden:* By signing up to garden you are responsible to maintain your plot and your volunteer assignments, regardless of vacations or other absences. Many people have co-gardeners or make other arrangements when they are away, but ultimately you remain responsible for your plot and your volunteer commitments. It is essential that you communicate any absences and what arrangements you’ve made to care for your garden to the inspection committee, the Executive Committee, and or volunteer committee chair if you’ve made commitments to support. Your commitments are your responsibility so please communicate early and often, as it is the number one problem we have with gardeners/plots, and the number one problem that leads to misunderstandings and gardening administration issues. Also, as a last resort, if you can’t make arrangements or can’t find someone to care for your garden, we try to use volunteer backup gardeners, who may or may not respond, but who can, to a limited extent, take care of a plot. Bottom line: if you have issues, please reach out, help or answers can usually be found in the community.

*Communications.* Except as noted above, most communications are by email. The Executive Committee maintains a roster that includes members' email addresses and phone numbers. To facilitate informal communications with your neighboring gardeners, we will provide members a garden map link on our website with the location of each plot and its plot number, and a separate directory with contact information of all gardeners who have not opted out of sharing their contact information.

*Volunteering:* Volunteer! Volunteerism is a requirement for being a garden member. It's also essential to maintain the health and welfare of our garden community. We need MAXIMUM participation on cleanup days and for various other tasks that must be performed throughout the season. Everything the community garden provides you -- the fencing, irrigation, tools, sheds, garbage pickup on cleanup days, soil amendment delivery to your plot in spring, mowing, and many other things -- is all done by member volunteers. OUR SUCCESS DEPENDS ON YOU! A more complete description of the standard volunteer positions and how to volunteer is in the application.

If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please DO use the garden email to contact committee leads, at [rockcreekgarden@gmail.com](mailto:rockcreekgarden@gmail.com).