



# THE SPROUT

**MONTGOMERY PARKS COMMUNITY GARDEN PROGRAM  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER | FALL 2025**

Greetings Gardeners,

What a season! Each season, my role as a Program Manager evolves with new responsibilities and new opportunities to learn more about myself, the program, and the amazing people who travel through as staff and leave as family. Their time here is my opportunity to mentor and share insights about life, local government, and all the nuances of working with people and plants. As Earth moves into Fall, so do we - shedding whatever leftover lessons from summer and transiting into deep reflection and solitude. I want to say thank you to Emma, Natalie, and Elizabeth for such a wonderful and fulfilling summer; they've been patient with me, and they've challenged me to step into the spotlight and be proud of all we've accomplished together. The garden is the constant that keeps us all moving, connected, and well-fed - mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Grab a cup of tea and read on!

- Michelle Nelson, Community Garden Program Manager

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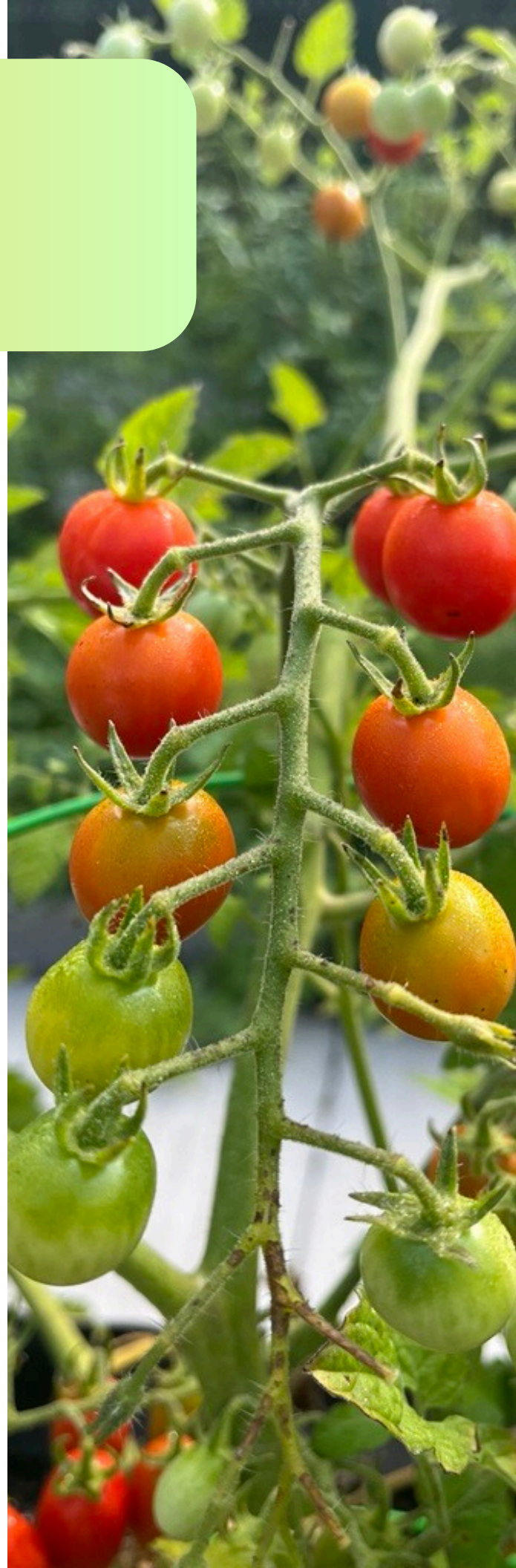
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# UPDATES

## Fall Guideline

Per the Conditions of Use: By **November 1**, gardeners must remove weeds, dead plants, and summer crops that are done producing from plots. Perennials, fall/winter hardy vegetables, and cover crops can remain in the plot.

## Permit Renewals & Fees

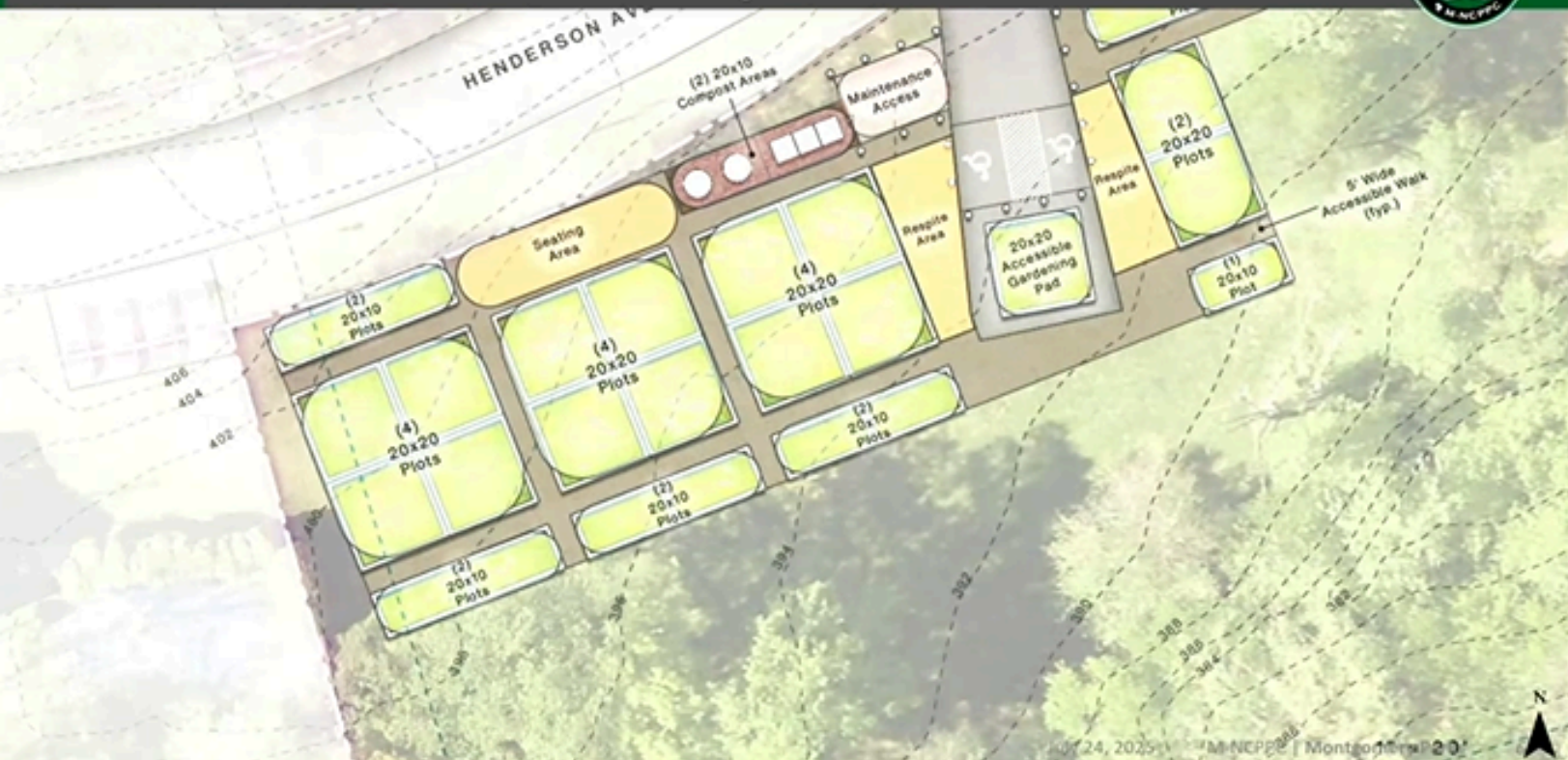
Renewals are coming up soon! If you are interested in gardening next year, make sure your plot is in good standing and meets the November guideline.

Please let us know as soon as possible if you are **not interested in renewing** your garden permit. More information about renewals will be shared through Groups.io in November.

Plot fees will be increasing for the first time since 2016. The new fees are listed below. For more information, see the email that was sent on August 11 about plot fees.

- Gardening Tables and Raised Beds - \$35
- 100 square feet - \$35
- 200 square feet - \$60
- 300 square feet - \$70
- 400 square feet - \$80
- 625 square feet - \$100

## Henderson Avenue Community Garden at WRP



## Greenspace Equity Program Award

Maryland Department of Natural Resources' [Greenspace Equity Program](#) provides grants for implementing projects to preserve, create, and improve public greenspace in underserved communities. [22 projects](#) across Maryland were selected for funding for fiscal year 2025. Montgomery Parks was awarded funding to create a large, ADA accessible community garden at Wheaton Regional Park. The [Wheaton Regional Park Master Plan](#) identified community gardens as one of the top amenities requested by residents in the area. Analysis of the community garden waitlists has also reflected this demand. Henderson Avenue Community Garden is in the design stage (the early concept is pictured above) and is expected to open by 2028. The garden will have approximately 30-40 plots ranging from gardening tables to 100 and 200-square foot in-ground plots. This will bring us closer to our goal of 18 gardens by 2028!





## Staff Updates

The CG team is going through several bittersweet staffing transitions:

- We were lucky to have Elizabeth Serra (pictured above, far left) join us as a summer intern; she learned about behind-the-scenes operations and worked on expanding the program's donation efforts.
- Natalie Mayanja, Grown@Pope Coordinator, (second from the left) moved on to new opportunities after leading the project for the past four seasons.
- We welcomed Gwendolyn Bagley as a new Coordinator in late August.
- Emma Morel (far right) will be leaving her role as the Assistant Manager in early October and moving to North Carolina.

See the following pages for more information about these changes.



## Grown@Pope Coordinator Transition

Natalie Mayanja first got involved with the CG Program as a gardener at Rocking Horse. In Spring 2022, she joined the CG team as the Grown@Pope Coordinator. Under Natalie's leadership, Grown@Pope has produced and donated over 7,000 pounds of produce, and has welcomed hundreds of volunteers who have contributed over 5,000 hours. We have been constantly inspired by Natalie's dedication to creating an inclusive garden with a focus on care farming as well as her innovation and enthusiasm to try new things. We were sad to see her go in August, but are excited to follow her journey!

### What was your favorite part of the job?

"I've enjoyed having a job where every day I felt like I was doing something meaningful - giving residents and groups the opportunity to experience outdoor recreation, gardening, nature and each other in a new way; where folks are doing something good for each other and then get to learn from their own experience about nature and gardening."

### What was your favorite thing that you grew?

"Growing the knowledge and skills necessary for small lot farming and having the opportunity to have that experience in a community setting with many likeminded people."

### What's the most important thing you learned?

"I don't know what is next so I am most excited to take a leap of faith into the unknown. The lessons I learned about growth, that everything starts small, is what I will take with me. Trying to be patient with the growth of a new journey."







### **New Grown@Pope Coordinators**

Gwen Bagley grew up in Pomfret, Maryland and spent a great deal of time outdoors hiking, canoeing, and birdwatching in the woods and swamps of southern MD. While studying Political Science at St. Mary's College, she began working at a nearby organic farm, which was her first experience with gardening and growing food sustainably. Inspired to seek a career that would allow her to spend time outdoors, work with her hands, and help people and the environment, she attended the University of Maryland and received an MS in Conservation Biology.



For the past 15 years Gwen has been employed at the USDA research facility in Beltsville, MD, studying soil greenhouse gas emissions and working to better integrate cover crops within Mid-Atlantic cropping systems. She comes to Montgomery Parks after a reduction in force, and is excited to work more directly with providing nutritious food to the community. She looks forward to meeting everyone here and growing a diversity of exciting foods. She currently lives in Burtonsville, MD with her partner and dog, and has a small garden where she loves growing cherry tomatoes.

An additional Grown@Pope Coordinator will join the team in September!



## Assistant Manager Transition

Hi gardeners,

After an incredible couple of years in the DMV, my husband and I have decided to move back to our home state (North Carolina) in October. While I'm excited to be closer to family, I am incredibly sad to say goodbye to this community.

I started working with the CG Program as the first Grown@Pope Coordinator from Summer 2021 to Spring 2022 and was thrilled to become the Assistant Manager in early 2023. This role has truly been the most rewarding job I've had and I'm eternally grateful to Michelle for the opportunity, the mentorship, and the friendship. Gardeners, I've loved watching the magic of seeds in your plots, from producing food to growing communities. It has been a joy and an honor to learn from you. I'm going to miss chatting in the garden, sharing recipes, and admiring everyone's unique growing style. Thank you all for welcoming me into your plots and making this job so fulfilling!

I'm unsure what lies ahead, but I'm hoping to continue working in food systems at the intersection of people and nature.

If you'd like to keep in touch, you can email me (Emma.Morel@proton.me) or reach out on [LinkedIn](#).

Thank you all and happy gardening!  
Emma





# FEATURES

## National GrowTogether Conference

In June, the CG team traveled to New York City for the 2025 National GrowTogether Conference, hosted by NYC Parks GreenThumb, Denver Urban Gardens (DUG), the Urban Garden Project, and the American Community Gardening Association.

Michelle and Emma gave a presentation about using GIS to modernize community garden operations, specifically in terms of making more informative maps and increasing efficiency and clarity when conducting inspections. We learned from other presenters about strategies for evaluating gardening programs and attended workshops about participatory garden designs and placemaking. There were also multiple sessions that explored different community garden models - from grassroots efforts to citywide programs. We heard from garden leaders all around the country, including NYC, Atlanta, Denver, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Michelle participated in a panel discussion with large-scale garden leaders from Philadelphia, Seattle, and Minneapolis. The conference was a great opportunity to learn about what makes each garden or garden program unique!







On the last day of the conference, we were able to visit a handful of NYC's 550 community gardens. On the East Harlem Community Garden Tour, we learned how gardeners revitalized abandoned lots and turned them into community gathering spaces. At Maggie's Magic Garden, art made from recycled materials was sprinkled throughout the trees and on trellises, including pistachio shells painted to look like ladybugs and yogurt containers transformed into flowers. Gardeners at Humacao CG developed an on-site compost system. Each garden was distinct and really represented their community's interests and needs.



Raised beds and hanging art at Maggie's Magic Garden.



An apple tree and flowers at Humacao Community Garden.



A compostable toilet at Rodale Pleasant Park Garden.



## Summer Internship

by Elizabeth Serra

I had the pleasure of working with Michelle and Emma this summer as an intern. I've learned that this program is important because it provides resources for gardening, a sense of community, and food security. I was able to support Community Gardens by assisting with donation plots, inspections, harvest parties, events, and overall operations. I squished as many spotted lantern flies as I could too! During this time, I met lots of gardeners and volunteers. I especially liked to observe the variety of creative gardening techniques and learn about new crops.

I was particularly impressed with the food donation projects. Last year, community gardeners donated over 2,000 pounds of produce! To help support this initiative, I created documents that share how and where to donate extra produce. These resources are posted at each garden. My hope is that people can feel empowered to pitch in as a group or donate produce on their own. I have helped at harvest parties and was able to see how passionate our gardeners are about working together and helping the community. I hope you all keep it up!

I enjoyed learning about every community garden within the program. Each garden has something that makes it stand out and represents the program well. I want to share a few gardens that stood out to me as highlights of the program's mission and values.







## Briggs Chaney: Donation Champion

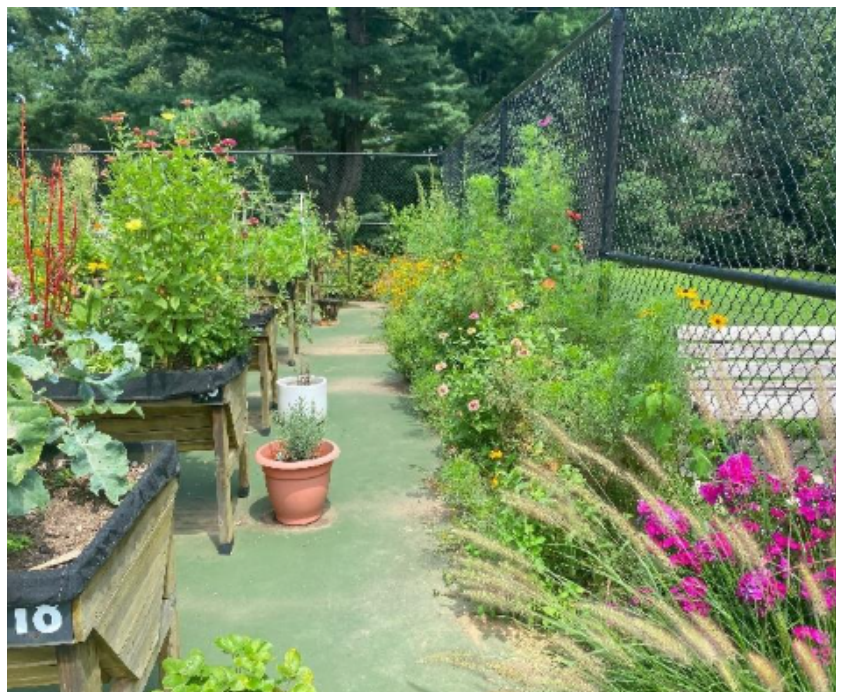
With 120 plots, Briggs Chaney is the program's largest garden. Most plots are 625 square feet and gardeners are very creative with their growing space. Additionally, it is one of the oldest gardens in the program.

Gardeners here have lots of space to work with and in the summer, their plots are bursting with veggies. With all this extra produce, gardeners here came together to organize a system for donating food to those in need. The garden holds "Harvest Parties" every other weekend. The consistency and reliable support system is what works best for them. Every harvest party, gardeners harvest their own plots and donate some of their yield. Although each plot might only donate a little, it all adds up. It is collected, packaged, sorted and weighed before a volunteer transports it to Rainbow Community Development Center, where the fresh produce joins a larger food distribution event that occurs every second and fourth Saturday of the month.

Within a few hours on a Saturday morning, Briggs Chaney will collect somewhere around 400 pounds of food! A large part of these donations is from Briggs Chaney's grow-to-donate plot, run by garden volunteers. These hardworking individuals plan, plant, cultivate, and harvest produce all to be donated. A plot dedicated specifically to donating ensures that a bulk amount of produce is available. Additionally, volunteers can prioritize growing foods that are popular requests from the community it serves.

## Nolte: Flower Power

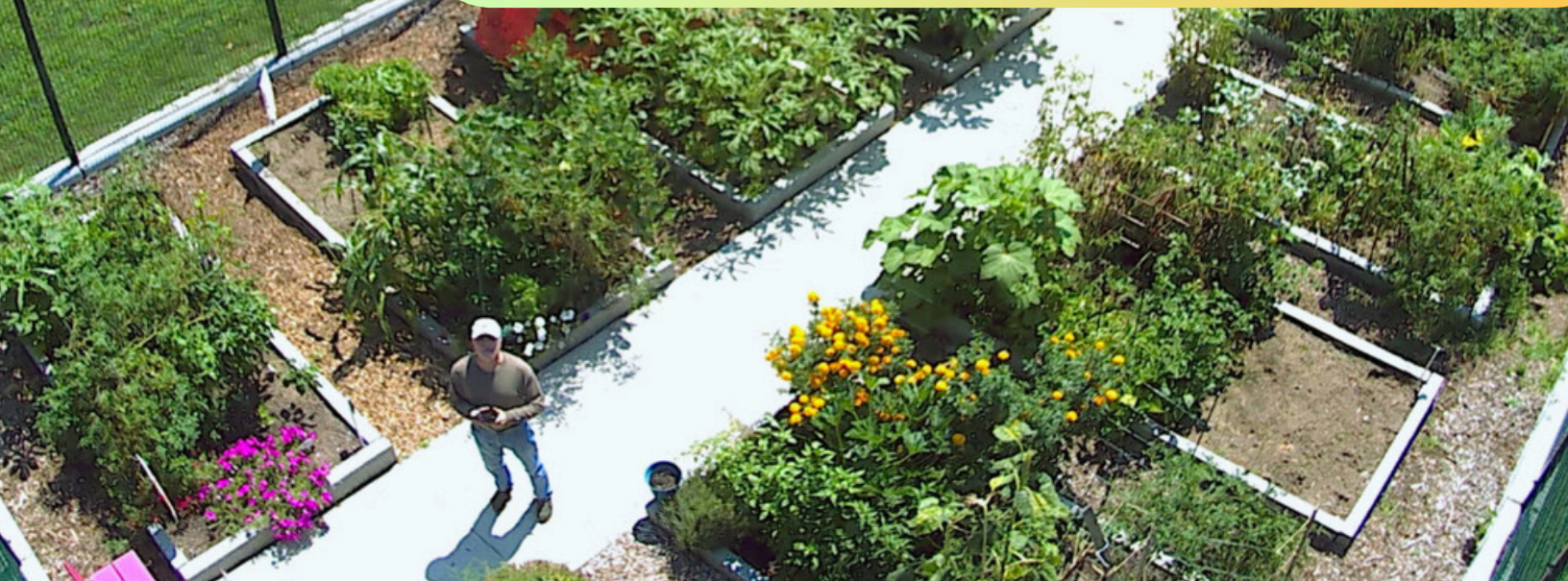
Nolte CG is one of the smaller gardens. All plots are raised, accessible beds. Gardeners here are creative with how they fit their crops into a small space. The highlight of this garden is the shared community space. Along the edges of the garden, there was a strip of ground in between the concrete pad and the fence that wasn't being used. Gardeners had an idea to fill these spaces with beautiful flowers. You can't see any hard lines or plot numbers dividing up the flower sections. They all blend in together, but gardeners each pitched in by planting a small section and maintaining it by weeding. The flowers benefit everyone. They brighten up the garden and attract pollinators, which help everyone's plants! This is the true spirit of community gardening.



I will be returning to the University of Maryland this fall for my senior year. I'll be finishing up my degree in Geography and Remote Sensing of Environmental Change. The Community Garden Program was an amazing opportunity for me to learn about the ways we can manage land sustainably for the environment and community.



# IN THE GARDEN



## What's Growing

- **Direct Sow:** beets, carrots, garlic, leeks, lettuce, mustard greens, onions, radishes, spinach
- **Transplant:** collards, kale, kohlrabi
- **Harvest:** beans, beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, chard, collards, eggplants, kale, kohlrabi, lettuce, mustard greens, onions, parsley, parsnips, pumpkins, radishes, spinach, squash, corn, sweet potatoes, turnips
- **Flowers in Bloom:** anemones, asters, black-eyed Susans, cardinal flower, chrysanthemums, goldenrod, pansies

Take a look at [UME's Planting Calendar](#) for more information. The planting calendar will be updated this fall! More crops will be added and it will be translated into 7 additional languages.



## Creative Cultivation at Rocking Horse

By Elizabeth Serra

Rocking Horse Community Garden is in Rockville, MD on Montgomery County Public Schools property, but is managed by the CG program. There are 58 plots, each 200 or 400 square feet. It's full of diverse cultures and crops. This garden stands out because it represents the creativity of a diverse group of growers. There are many different techniques here. Some gardeners grow many different crops in small sections throughout their garden. Others prefer to grow only one or two of their favorite crops, which cover their entire plot. Here are some gardening tips from Rocking Horse!

**Easy beds.** You can get a free compost bin from your local library! This bin is like a little fence that can be rolled out in a circle to hold compost. Tip: you can use this material to line your garden beds, creating raised beds. It makes a more organized garden that is divided into manageable sections. Visit DEP's website to find the closest [compost bin pickup location](#).

**More growing space.** Some gardeners struggle with growing root vegetables because of the soil makeup. To work around this, gardeners have opted for pots and raised beds. However, this can be expensive and hard to install. Using a durable reusable bag is a creative way to grow veggies above ground. This is also a great option for balcony gardens!

**Take notes!** A big part of gardening is trial and error. Make a map of your plot to stay organized. Record any changes and rotations throughout the summer. Take lots of pictures and notes of what works well. Next year, refer to these notes and make changes if needed.





**Stopping the weeds.** Use ground cover to keep weeds from coming up! There are several options. You can use mulch, a ground cover crop like clover, and tarp or landscape fabric. All these options can cover not just your walkways, but your beds too. When using a tarp or landscape fabric, you can cut out holes for the spacing of a crop, cover a bed, then plant into the cut outs. This will keep moisture from evaporating quickly from your soil and save you a lot of weeding time.



**Donation Method.** Rocking Horse has a great method for donating food as a community. Every Saturday and Sunday mornings, gardeners leave extra produce in donation bins on their community area. A volunteer will come pick them up around noon and take everything to the nearest foodbank. This way there is consistency and people can contribute whenever they are available.



**Using your crops.** I asked Rocking Horse gardeners to share their favorite recipes:

- [Chamomile Tea](#)
- [Hot Pepper Adobo Sauce](#)
- [Sweet Pepper Stir Fry](#)
- [Tomatillo Salsa](#)
- [Roma Tomato Sauce](#)
- [Tomato Sandwich](#)
- [Green Tomato Chutney](#)
- [Yellow Tomato Preserves](#)
- [Eggplant Parmesan](#)
- [Pink Banana Squash Soup](#)
- [Zucchini Pie](#)
- [Zucchini Blueberry Bread](#)
- [Cucumber Salad](#)
- [Fava Beans Puree](#)
- [Leek Soup](#)
- [Roasted Kohlrabi](#)



# SEASONAL RECIPE

## Spiced Roasted Carrots with Sumac Whipped Feta

**Yield:** 4-6 servings

**Time:** 50 minutes

### Ingredients

For the spiced carrots:

- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp honey or brown sugar
- ½ to 1 tsp Aleppo pepper or chili flakes
- ¼ tsp cumin
- ¼ tsp paprika
- ⅛ tsp cinnamon
- salt and pepper to taste
- 8-10 small to medium carrots

For the sumac whipped feta:

- 4 oz feta cheese
- ½ cup whole fat Greek yogurt
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp sumac
- 1 tsp fresh lemon juice

Optional toppings:

- ¼ cup pomegranate seeds
- ¼ cup pistachios, chopped
- crumbled feta
- chopped parsley, mint, or cilantro





## Preparation

**Step 1** - Preheat oven to 425°F. Grease sheet pan/roasting tray lightly or line with parchment paper.

**Step 2** - Clean carrots and, depending on size, cut them in half lengthwise.

**Step 3** - Place carrots on sheet pan. Drizzle with olive oil, honey, and spices. Toss well to coat and season with salt and pepper.

**Step 4** - Roast in the oven for 15-30 minutes, depending on the size of your carrots, tossing them halfway through. They should be fork tender and caramelized on the outside.

**Step 5** - While the carrots are in the oven, blend the feta, yogurt, oil, lemon juice and sumac in a food processor or blender until smooth.

**Step 6** - Dollop and spread whipped feta on the bottom of a serving plate and top with your carrots

**Step 7** - Sprinkle pistachios, pomegranate seeds, fresh chopped parsley, and/or more crumbled feta on top if you desire.

Recipe and image from [OliveAndMango.com](https://OliveAndMango.com).



# EVENTS

## September

### **Herb Society of America, Mid-Atlantic District Gathering**

Friday, September 5 - Sunday, September 7; Hunt County, VA

### **DC State Fair** (free)

Saturday, September 6, 10 am - 5 pm; Bryant St NE, Washington, DC

### **Maryland Apple Harvest Cider Festival** (\$40-50)

Sat, Sept 6, 12 am - 4 pm; Two Story Chimney Ciderworks, Gaithersburg, MD

### **Fresh Starts & Final Harvests Webinar** (free)

Wednesday, September 10, 7 pm; Virtual through HarvestShare

### **Adaptive Recreation - Gardening 101** (\$42)

Weekly, Thurs, September 11 - November 20, 4 pm - 5 pm; Black Hill, Boyds, MD

### **Perfume in Bloom: A Journey through Botanical Scents** (\$25)

Thursday, September 11, 10:30 am - 12 pm; Brookside, Wheaton, MD

### **Maryland Restaurant Week**

Friday, September 12 - Sunday, September 21; Restaurants across MD

### **Fall Wildflower Walk** (\$7)

Sun, September 14, 10 am - 11:30 am; Locust Grove Nature Center, Bethesda, MD

### **Gardening with your body: Getting in the dirt without the hurt** (\$20)

Sunday, September 14, 2 pm - 4 pm; Locust Grove Nature Center, Bethesda, MD

### **Bilingual Nature Walk: Native Plants, Pollinators, and Edible Gardens** (\$12)

Thursday, September 18, 1 pm - 2:30 pm; Brookside, Wheaton, MD

### **Build a Fall-Blooming Container Garden** (\$55)

Friday, September 19, 10:30 am - 12 pm; Brookside, Wheaton, MD



## September

### **Fall Native Plant Sale**

Sat, Sept 20 - Sun, Sept 21, 10 am - 2 pm; Pope Farm Nursery, Gaithersburg, MD

### **Sustainable Gardening Strategies** (\$25)

Tuesday, September 23, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm; Burtonsville, MD

### **Foodie Fridays - Composting** (\$15-20)

Friday, September 26, 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm; Josiah Henson Museum, Rockville, MD

### **Backyard Herbs: Medicine Making** (\$50)

Sunday, September 28, 12 pm - 2 pm; Smile Herb Shop, College Park, MD

## October

### **Montgomery Parks Harvest Festival** (\$20/car)

Saturday, October 4, 11 am - 4 pm; Ag History Farm Park, Derwood, MD

### **Tea Blending Workshop** (\$24)

Saturday, October 4, 1 pm - 2:30 pm; Plants Alive!, Silver Spring, MD

### **Takoma Park Street Festival** (free)

Sunday, October 5, 10 am - 5 pm; Carroll Ave, Takoma Park, MD

### **Seed Saving: Harvesting & Storing Your Garden's Bounty** (\$25)

Saturday, October 11, 10:30 am - 12 pm; Brookside, Wheaton, MD

### **Fall Harvest Family Day** (free)

Saturday, October 11, 11 am - 3 pm; Woodlawn Manor Park, Sandy Spring, MD

### **Mushroom Fair hosted by Mycological Association of Washington, DC** (free)

Sunday, October 12, 12 pm - 5 pm; Brookside, Wheaton, MD

### **Fall Apple Harvest** (\$12)

Friday, October 17, 11 am - 1:30 pm; Meadowside Nature Center, Rockville, MD

## November

### **Make Your Own Foraged Wreath** (\$65)

Sunday, November 9, 9 am - 12:30 pm; Fox Haven Farm, Jefferson, MD



# RESOURCES

## Read

**Crops for Winter Growing** by Johnny's Seeds

**Edible: 70 Sustainable Plants That Are Changing How We Eat** by Kevin Hobbs and Artur Cisar-Erlach, Illustrated by Katie Kulla

**Harvesting and Preserving Herbs** by UMD Extension

**The Herb Book: The Stories, Science, and History of Herbs** by DK Publishing

**Squash: Guide to Common Pests and Diseases** by Ashleigh Smith, True Leaf Market

## Listen

**Episode 249: Community Gardening** (with Michelle Nelson!) on the GardenDC Podcast

**Episode 607 July - Climate Resilient Gardens** on The Garden Thyme Podcast

## Watch

**5 Easy Veggies to Plant in Fall and Forget All Winter** by The Millennial Gardener

**Vegetable Growing in Small Spaces Webinar** by UMD Extension Home & Garden Information Center

