

## Growers News for the Week of January 15, 2018

Hurricanes, floods, drought, freezing temperatures all can cause havoc in agriculture and certainly in the OFE 5<sup>th</sup> grade gardens. When all four happen in less than six months, it can be discouraging, especially for new gardeners. **Why bother to try to grow food in a garden when it is readily available at the grocery store?** There is a certain amount of discipline that a gardener must take even as all these negative things happen. Since most crops have a relatively short window for planting and when they will mature, in spite of rain, sleet or snow, the onions will need to be planted in the next few weeks or they won't mature during the cool spring weather. Onion sets are tough little plants and probably would survive even the mid 20 degree temperatures we are expecting this week. Consequently the volunteers and the students will have to tough it out and get them planted.

Answering the question above is simple. Home grown organic food has more nutrients, is much fresher, and can be much cheaper than most store bought food. For many people, too, picking and eating a fresh home grown tomato or other fruit or vegetable is a very satisfying feeling. We see it all the time with the 5<sup>th</sup> graders. They are so proud of their produce and because they grow them they are often willing to eat things they would never try at home. A home garden can be very productive. A yard full of grass is mostly wasted space and in many cases in that space you could grow much of your own food.

The final **bed rebuilding project** for this year was completed by the volunteers in the past few weeks. All raised beds were originally built with donated lumber. As this lumber deteriorates, we have been rebuilding with concrete blocks. Some of the beds are also being raised to give the plant roots more good soil in which to grow. The native soil under the main garden was most likely fill dirt brought in when the school was built. Over the years that dirt has been replaced with compost and good soil. By raising the beds not only can the soil be improved but the drainage is also enhanced. Each block has two holes of a perfect size to plant onions, lettuce or other small plants in each.

**In the Classroom:** The next lessons that will be covered in class will be about potatoes and planting a tree. As we don't know yet how this freeze affected our garden, we may be replanting some of our crops. We hope to resume our normal class schedule on Thursday, but may not have that opportunity. Let's hope for the best.

Students are being encouraged to bring in their \$3.00 donation for the purchase of the oak tree that each fifth grade class gives to the school. This donation should be earned by the students, not given to them. Any classroom that has 100% participation will be treated to a dessert party. The **Arbor Day celebration will be on February 22 at 1:30**. Mark your calendar to attend as this is one of the big events each year for the 5<sup>th</sup> graders.

Many bags of **leaves and pine needles** were spread during the MLK break. We will still accept clean leaves, especially mulched ones, and clean pine needles. It is discouraging to open bags to find garbage and animal wastes in them. Please bring only clean material to drop off.

**Fig Jam:** We are still trying to liquidate 61 jars of fig jam. (Buy four for \$20 and get a 5<sup>th</sup> jar Free!) Help us if you can. E-mail: [josanders@verizon.net](mailto:josanders@verizon.net) if you can use a supply of this.

The **OFE Growers** are an all volunteer non-profit organization created specifically to fund and administer the gardens and nature programs at the school. We can always use additional volunteers. Let us know if you would like to help and learn to garden at the same time. Mrs. Krenek is our president. Do talk to her or send her an e-mail at: [deborah.krenek@humbleisd.net](mailto:deborah.krenek@humbleisd.net), if you have questions. You can also learn about the OFE Growers and see pictures of the students in action in the gardens by going to their web site at: [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org). Additional features are continuing to be added to the website. Recently a complete layout of the newly repositioned gardens was added. <http://www.ofegrowers.org/garden-layouts.html>.