

It is onion season at Oak Forest. While the harvest will be in May, first the students have to plant the onions. To that end, last week two teams planted almost 700 onion sets. We hope to do the same this week. We are often asked what do you do with all the onions. Well, unfortunately some don't make it! There are planting errors, there sometimes are weather problems, and then there are the squirrels and other critters that live around the school gardens. With luck though, each 5th grader should take home five or six nice onions by the end of the school year. To enhance their knowledge, Mrs. Keifer will be covering onions from the lesson in the student gardening manual. You can also follow the lesson on line by going to <http://www.ofegrowers.org/garden-lesson-manual.html>.

Last Thursday was the biggest harvest of the school year so far. The leafy greens are loving this weather. Lots of lettuce is ready to go home with the students as well as other cool season crops. Those include sugar snap peas, mizuna and kohlrabi. Broccoli and cauliflower are at their peak. We will have another picking of oranges this week. Each student got a navel orange last week and each will get a Republic of Texas orange this week. Due to a couple days of hard freezes in January last year, we have had almost no lemons or grapefruit this year. The bananas, too, froze to the ground and did not set any bunches this year. So far this winter we have not had a killing frost or freeze. If, and this is a big if, we don't experience one in the next 60 days we should have all of these fruits next year.

Acorns were planted by the students last week and will again be planted this week. They are planted in a four inch container filled with compost made by the students. These will be transplanted later on in the spring into gallon containers. These can be taken home by any student who has a place where they may be planted. This class is planting acorns harvested from the Principal's Oak, a type of red oak. This tree is right next to the principal's parking spot in front of the school.

Speaking of oaks, each student has been asked to earn three dollars as their contribution to the planting of the fifth grade class tree. We ask students to earn their money doing some work for parents, neighbors or relatives. We want the tree to come from them not their parents. They may be asked to write an essay on how they earned their money. See our web page to find out more at <http://www.ofegrowers.org/arbor-day.html>. As each student brings in their earned contribution, a leaf with his/her name will be placed on the large tree in the back hall. Mrs. Kreisler has made a tree and cut out leaves. She and Mrs. Brown mounted the tree last week for all to see. Already many of the branches have lots of leaves. Rooms with 100 per cent participation will be treated to a dessert party during the students' recess. Remind your student, if they have not yet earned their contribution. All contributions are due by January 31st.

If you have not yet seen the thief stealing our spinach in the garden, do go to our web site to see for yourself. Mr. Evans with the District set up a critter cam to catch the thief in action. Kind of a cute thief but unfortunately his gain is our students' loss. Not much spinach to put in the grocery bags this year.

We are still accepting your bags of leaves and pine needles. No brush or extra heavy bags please! We use hundreds of bags of these organic materials each school year making compost and mulching trees and other plantings. Since leaves and pine needles are not available year round, we do stockpile some of them in our orchard area. So, if you see some bags sitting around, do not despair. They will be used eventually. Thanks to all of you that have brought them to us this year and kept these valuable resources out of the landfill on Atascocita Road.

The OFE Growers is a group of parents, grandparents, and community members who volunteer to maintain the gardens and nature areas at the school. We are a 501-c-3 all volunteer non-profit organization. Emily Fortner, a 5th grade science and math teacher, is the president of the Growers organization. We would love to have new volunteers and support from you. Give Mrs. Fortner a call at 281-641-2834 or e-mail her at: emily.fortner@humbleisd.net, if you have questions or can help in any way. Please consider making a donation to the OFE Growers this year. Contributions can be sent to: OFE Growers, PO Box 1525, Kingwood, TX 77325. We appreciate your donations to help fund the gardening program. We do not receive funding from the school district. We also are not part of the PTA although we do work closely with them on many projects. Our budget this year is \$9350. That is a chunk, but every little bit helps.

Without your support we could not offer this 'hands-on' program to the students! Thanks!