

Another four bunches of the onion sets were planted this past week. Each bunch has about 70 seedlings in it which were started from seed on about October 15th. That brings the total to about 1000. Even if only half of them make it, that would give each 5th grade student 5 onions to take home in May! We hope to plant the rest this week, about 200 more. Mrs. Keifer taught Mrs. Smart's class all about onions. The students learned that the Texas 1015Y onion is the Texas state vegetable. Dr. Leonard Pike, a plant researcher at Texas A&M University, developed this disease resistant sweet onion for the Texas growers. Onions prior to the 1015Y did not grow well in our diverse climates and soil types. The 1015 changed all that! Dr. Pike also developed the very nutritious Aggie maroon carrot. We love to grow those in the garden as well. Some seed of this carrot was planted this past Thursday. It is maroon on the outside with an orange center.

We chose to plant an improved 1015Y onion variety by the name of Texas Legend this year. It is purportedly earlier and larger than even the former! Dixondale Farms, which grows most of the onions sold as sets in Texas, has once again expressed an interest in seeing photos from our onion planting and harvest. Several years ago, OFE students harvesting onions were featured in their catalog with a photo and a short write-up.

It was again a week of big harvests. Most of the rest of the citrus was harvested ahead of the expected freeze this past weekend. Students also harvested more of the beautiful Veronica Romanesque cauliflower. At a later time, we will discuss the math concept exhibited by this cauliflower and many other things in nature. Another team harvested about ten canes of sugar cane and cut it into sections that each student can take home. They were instructed that if they wanted to plant it to put it in a sunny spot, bury it about 3 inches deep, and keep it well watered. Or, they can peel it and chew on it like chewing gum. Very sweet!

Our resident tree rat (Did you see the video on our web site? <http://www.ofegrowers.org/message-board.html>) did not leave us much spinach, so a more vigorous type, by the name of Monstreaux de Viroflay was planted. We have high hopes for this, but will protect it with critter netting. All the acorns planted by the students are always protected by wire mesh cages from the marauding tree rats, but who knew that they also love the very healthy spinach! I guess we all need our greens!

Speaking of greens, a mess of them was harvested this past week. The harvest again included collards, cauliflower, turnips, beets, carrots, Swiss chard, lettuce, radishes, mizuna, kale, and sugar snap peas. The latter will be picking up shortly. Every week much French sorrel is harvested, but we doubt that most of it never makes it home in the grocery bags. Students eat it on the spot and beg for more! Why they love this sour green so much has always been a mystery to the grown-ups, but this has occurred with every class since we started planting it in the gardens years ago. Psst, please don't tell them how healthy the sorrel is for them!

Thanks for bringing your leaves and pine needles to us at the school. We really need more pine needles if you still have not raked yours. There is a sign by the east parking lot where you can drop them off.

Excitement is building for the 5th grade Arbor Day tree planting on February 28th. Already more than half the class has earned and donated their \$3 contribution to the purchase and planting of a 30 gallon oak tree. Trees for Houston has located a tree for us. As always we urge the students to earn the \$3 so the tree is a gift from them and not from their parents. The deadline to donate and be part of the planting team is January 31st. Each classroom that has 100% participation will earn a dessert party from the Growers volunteers.

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. Call Mrs. Fortner 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!