

Growers News for the Week of January 29, 2018

Finally a good gardening day! Mrs. Krenek's classes were able to plant their onion sets. The beds had been prepared and extra rock phosphate added to the soil in anticipation of the planting. The bundles of onion sets were laid out and students started planting them four inches apart in the annex area. Typically each bundle has about 50 to 60 onion seedlings in it. However, this year, Dixondale Farms was particularly generous. Each bundle seemed to have at least 70 seedlings in it! The question was asked by a student as to how many onions each one of them would be able to take home in May. Well, a quick math lesson ensued to figure that out, given no catastrophes with the harvest.

The sugar cane at the end of the main garden was cut down this week. To the dismay of the students, it was found that the canes had frozen and the sap had soured somewhat. The nodes on the canes were for the most part also frozen, making planting them improbable. Fortunately, most students in both classrooms had already taken a piece of cane home before the freeze. Speaking of the freeze, we have been cleaning up frozen foliage and will start planting more cool-season crops. The students checked the planting chart in class to figure out what could reasonably be replanted. It was decided that the longer maturing crops would not be replanted as we need to keep space open for the potato planting as well as the warm season crops which will be going into the ground in March. Planning for the warm-season crops is well underway. Rotating the crops is very beneficial to the health of the plants, but difficult to accomplish with the finite space in the gardens. We do our best!

Planting potatoes was the subject in class. Even though we refer to these potatoes as white or Irish potatoes, neither is actually a good moniker. The potatoes can range in color from white, red, orange and purple, and definitely did not originate in Ireland! Students learned that the original potato grew wild in the Andes Mountains of Peru and were small, deep purple, bitter and slightly toxic. There are now over 5000 potato varieties grown all over the globe.

Students planted acorns in four inch pots this past week and Ms. Warnack's students will plant theirs this week. We purchased acorns from the Diamond-leaf Oak, *Quercus obtusa*, from our usual supplier, Louisiana Forest Seed Supply. It had been a bad acorn year for them, so we did not have the usual choices of acorns available to us. This oak should do quite well here, however. Students will nurture them and transplant them into larger pots. In May they can be taken home by students to plant around their homes or neighborhoods. This activity is in conjunction with **the planting of the class oak tree to be held on February 22**. If your student has not yet earned their three dollar donation, please help them do so soon. We do need to purchase the thirty gallon tree soon. We have not settled on a particular oak tree for purchase yet as the selections are very slim this year. We do hope to locate a suitable oak tree this week.

Fig Jam: The proceeds from our canning of summer produce helps to fund the gardens at Oak Forest. We are still trying to liquidate about 50 more jars of fig jam. There are still some pickles available, as well. (Buy four for \$20 and get a 5th jar free!) E-mail: josanders@verizon.net if you can help us out.

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, 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. 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>.

The gardeners urge you to make February, FALCON PRIDE month. Pick up a piece of litter on campus everyday and recycle your paper, cans, and plastic bottles in the big recycling bin out on the faculty parking lot. The gardeners spend a lot of time picking up trash on campus! If everyone spent a minute a day doing this, that time could be better spent by the gardeners educating students. Let's take pride in how our campus looks!