

The students finished planting onions last Thursday. Mrs. Krenek led the students in that activity. Another four bunches of the onion sets were planted. Each bunch has about 70 seedlings in it which were started from seed on about October 15th. That brings the total to about 1200. We never have a 100% success rate but should have many hundreds of onions to harvest in May. Mrs. Keifer taught Mrs. Fortner's two 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. It is now hard to imagine onions without the 1015 variety. Ask you student why it is called a 1015Y.

. It is such a joy to have Mrs. Krenek joining us as a volunteer this year after her retirement last spring. The garden was named in her honor since she was the guiding faculty member over 15 years ago when the gardens were started. She was also the president of the OFE Growers organization. In spite of two frosts the past few weeks, our harvests have been big. The winter and cool season crops have not been harmed by the 30 degree temperatures. The high winds on the other hand have caused a bit of damage to the sugar snap peas as they grow up on trellises up to six feet high. The wind did cause some of them to break and fall off the fencing they grow on.

Last week students harvested lettuce, lots of herbs, mizuna, Swiss chard, beets, carrots, turnips, cauliflower, broccoli, kale, collards, radishes and our first kohlrabi. Most students have never seen or tasted kohlrabi. It is occasionally available at the grocery store. Try it if you never have before. Also the last of the citrus was picked and every student got a Republic of Texas orange. Finally, the last of the sugar cane was cut down and cut into sections for each student to take home. We always tell them they can plant it or eat it. Our three year old sugar cane plants love it up next to the south side of the school in good soil and with an irrigation sprinkler head right in that bed. Next to it are a couple cotton plants. Both these plants played important parts in Texas settlement and history.

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 has been planted and has already germinated. We have learned our lesson and will protect it with critter netting. The last batch of acorns was planted by the students. These are always protected by wire mesh cages from the marauding tree rats, but who knew that they also love the very healthy spinach! Yes, we all need our greens!

This week and next the students will be learning about potatoes. Mr. Langridge will be teaching the in class lesson. Mrs. Sanders has purchased the seed potatoes at a feed and seed store. Planting will begin this week weather permitting. From 20 pounds of seed potatoes, it is hoped over 200 pounds of new potatoes will be harvested in May. While sweet potatoes grow during the summer, Irish or red potatoes grow best here in Texas starting in late January. Rock phosphate is a natural nutrient used to boost production.

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. They are used for mulching and composting around the school grounds and in the gardens and orchard.

As of last Thursday, 81 students had contributed their \$3 donation for the 5th grade Arbor Day tree planting on February 28th. The final collection will be this week. Students contributing will be given a role in the planting. Classes with 100% participation will earn a dessert party, compliments of the OFE Growers.

Several of the Growers volunteers were able to attend the Manners Banquet last week. It is always a joy to see the students all dressed up and acting like perfect ladies and gentlemen.

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.

Please go to the web site for the Growers to see answers to puzzles, the tree rat, pictures of the students in action in the gardens and much more. www.ofegrowers.org