

Gardening never takes a break! While the students and staff have been away the garden volunteers have continued to tend the garden. Part of the pay off of being a volunteer is that when the students are away, sometimes there are fruits and veggies that need a home and our volunteers are always willing to give them a home.

The next few weeks, students will be preparing beds and planting our spring onion crop. Mrs. Opperman will cover page 21 in the student gardening manual letting the students learn all about onions, and especially the Texas 1015Y onions they will be planting. These onions can be planted in December or January from onion sets. They will mature and be ready for students to take home in early May. This assumes our weather will be normal. Last year we had a somewhat cool spring and that delayed the harvest to some degree.

Other activities in January will be the harvesting of the sugar cane and the yearly pumpkin smash. The pumpkin smash is lots of fun but also yields some valuable resources for later in the year. These pumpkins were picked up by volunteers after Thanksgiving and were diverted from the trash. We have about two dozen this year. After the students smash them, they will retrieve the seeds for planting and roasting. The remainder of the pumpkin flesh will go into the compost piles and will add nutrients to the rapidly developing compost.

We appreciate the donated bags of leaves and pine straw that have been dropped near the water tower at the back of the east parking lot. Much of it has been used to mulch the fruit trees in the orchard. Other mulched materials are sometimes used in the compost heaps. Other finely mulched materials are used to cover the planting beds or to be plowed into the planting beds to enrich the soil. If dropping off these materials, please remember, students can't handle very heavy bags and we don't want them handling trash, so only clean materials, please. No brush or tree trimmings.

While you are driving to the East side of the school, consider taking your cardboard and newspapers including junk mail to be put into the Paper Retriever bin along the fence line. Please no plastic or Styrofoam in this bin. And do collapse the boxes so they do not fill the bin with air. We would love OFE to be the greenest school in the area!

Please remember to go to the Growers website often (www.ofegrowers.org) to see pictures of the students in action in the gardens. Also go to the bulletin board section to learn about upcoming events such as the 5th grade tree planting. <http://www.ofegrowers.org/bulletin-board.html>

Students are being reminded about the tradition at Oak Forest that started in 2004. Former 5th grade teacher, Debbie Krenek, took up a collection from her class to buy a tree which they planted out in front of the school. Every year since, 5th graders have been collecting their pennies, dimes and quarters to plant another tree on campus. Each student is asked to earn \$3.00 as their contribution to this annual event. This year's tree will be planted in late January or early February out along the track. Collection of the students' donations starts this week.

If you would like to learn more about the Arbor Day tradition and see a list of all trees planted as part of this tradition, go to the Growers web page (see above) and click on Arbor Day. It is always an exciting day, with all students who donate to the tree fund helping in the planting exercise.