

Potatoes, potatoes and more potatoes! About half of the purchased seed potatoes were planted by Mrs. Smart's morning class. The spots where they were to be planted had been marked off on Tuesday, and holes dug. Mrs. Sanders prepared the cut seed potatoes to include at least one good 'eye', and treated them with elemental sulfur to prevent rot from setting in. Students placed the cut pieces into the prepared holes to which rock phosphate and MicroLife 6-2-4 fertilizer had been added. The potato pieces were then covered with three inches of soil. More soil will be added as the potato grows, thus elongating the underground stem on which the tubers (the potatoes) will grow.

After Mr. Langridge taught the lesson, Mrs. Opperman gave a quick safety lesson responding to an earlier incident in the garden. Wearing gloves in the garden is mandatory for the students, but the reason behind this rule was clearly demonstrated by Mr. Opperman. He had been casually pulling weeds around the compost bins without his gloves on. He felt a sudden hot stab of pain and realized that he had reached into a small clump of stinging nettle. These innocuous little plants have tiny spines made of silica that act like tiny hypodermic needles, causing intense burning and blistering that lasts for several days. The plant was shown to the fifth graders so that they might recognize it before reaching into it. Students seemed to have taken the lesson to heart, as several sharp eyed students pointed out a similar looking plant and asked if it was the offending weed, which we are happy to report, it was not.

Students harvested quite a variety of things including collards, cabbage, kohlrabi, broccoli, lettuce, carrots, turnips, radishes, some sugar snap peas, grapefruit, mizuna and French sorrel. More pieces of sugar cane were also sent home. All the mature canes have now been cut. Mr. Opperman brought oranges from his Republic of Texas tree he grows at home to share with the students. His tree has a super abundance of fruit this year! Unfortunately the grapefruit tree only had about a half dozen fruit, so only a few were available to be taken home. Some citrus tends to do well one year and then take the next year off.

While the growers were at lunch, it unfortunately started to rain, so the afternoon class was not able to garden. Mr. Langridge proceeded with the potato lesson and Mrs. Sanders, who is a retired math teacher, did some practical math problems as they relate to gardening, with the class. Mrs. Simmons, Kiefer, and Opperman stayed out in the rain to harvest some produce for the class to take home.

An interesting discussion ensued on the OFE parents face book page, about the identity of a vegetable brought home by a fifth grader that Thursday. Mrs. Opperman identified it as a kohlrabi. This is not a commonly grown vegetable here, and thus is not well known or used. As it turned out, some mothers do know of it and use it in their cooking repertoire. It seems that the favorite way of using it is as an apple/kohlrabi slaw. That was a new one to Mrs. Opperman, who had to look up some recipes for that. She will be incorporating this into her meals, too, as it seems like a tasty combination of flavors.

Our resident tree rat did not leave us much spinach! While doing weekend chores, the Oppermans noticed that the critter has now set its teeth into the Swiss chard. Well it indeed loves to eat healthy as chard is a spinach relative that is also very healthy! Grr! Anyone want to loan us a cat for the garden?

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, 101 students had contributed their \$3 donation for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Arbor Day tree planting on February 28<sup>th</sup>. 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.

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 5<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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](http://www.ofegrowers.org)