

Last Thursday was Fun Run Day at OFE. The garden volunteers had to get up extra early to prepare for and conduct the first gardening class at 9 AM instead of the normal time of 10:30. This was so the 5<sup>th</sup> graders could participate in their scheduled run time of 10 AM. It was a warm and muggy morning but both the gardening class and the run concluded by the time a cold front came through about 11 AM. The rains came, about a half inch, and then the wind and cold came. By the time it was time for the afternoon class the temperature had dropped 30 degrees and the rain had stopped. Class was held as normal. Long time volunteers can never remember it raining only during lunch time and both morning and afternoon classes were held as usual.

It was again potato planting day in the gardens and in the classroom where Mr. Langridge gave the students all the information they needed to know to plant, take care of, and eventually harvest their potatoes. About half of the purchased seed potatoes were planted by Mrs. Fortner's classes in the orchard beds. Planting spots had been prepared on Tuesday. Mr. Langridge and his team fertilized and planted over 70 potato hills during the classes. Mrs. Sanders had previously 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 was 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.

In class Mrs. Opperman gave a quick safety lesson responding to an incident in the garden last week. 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. As we always tell the students, "Safety is no accident!" Even an experienced gardener can let his guard down and pay the price when that happens. Thank goodness there are not very many of these plants around the campus!

It was again a good harvest day as cauliflower, cabbage, kohlrabi, broccoli, lettuce, carrots, turnips, radishes, sugar snap peas, mizuna, and French sorrel were sent home with students. More pieces of sugar cane were also cut and sent home. Mr. Opperman again brought oranges from his Republic of Texas tree from home. His tree has a super abundance of fruit this year so he shares the excess with the students! His tree is about 15 years old and has produced over 10 buckets of oranges this year. Our Republic of Texas tree in the orchard is only about 8 years old but had a good crop which we harvested several weeks ago. The next fruit to be harvested will be the loquats. Many people grow loquats, but do not harvest the tasty fruits.

The collection for the planting of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade tree on February 28<sup>th</sup> concluded last week. One hundred and twenty one 5<sup>th</sup> grade students earned their \$3 contribution towards the planting of the tree which will be a Chinkapin Oak. The planting will take place at 1:30 and everyone is invited to attend. This tree will be planted on the south side of the school along the track. Last summer the Growers placed an irrigation line out in that area to make sure these new trees are properly irrigated. You can go to the web site to learn more about Arbor Day at OFE and all the trees that have been donated by previous 5<sup>th</sup> graders. <http://www.ofegrowers.org/arbor-day.html>. The students will learn the proper way to plant a containerized tree in class this week and next. Speaking of trees, the acorns the students planted just a few weeks ago are starting to sprout. Several experiments are being done with these plantings.

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. Contributions can be sent to: OFE Growers, PO Box 1525, Kingwood, TX 77325. We appreciate your donations to help fund the gardening program.

Please go to the web site for the Growers to see answers to puzzles, the tree rat video, photos of the students in action in the gardens, and much more. [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org)