

Spring is about to burst forth in the OFE Gardens. Robins are busy scratching for worms, the citrus tree blossoms are ready to open, the seed potatoes planted three weeks ago have already poked out of the soil, and spring crops are almost ready to be planted. The sugar snap peas are at their peak right now. Most students should be taking some home this week.

Soon it will be time to plant the tomato crop for this year in the garden. Last year the garden had about fifty tomato plants and it was a good crop at the school. While many of the tomatoes go home with students before the end of the school year, many more were harvested by volunteers and students during June and July. Many of these were preserved as salsa and other items. Parents, teachers, and others purchased over 900 jars this past fall as part of the garden fund raiser. Small tomato plants are already growing in Mrs. Sander's greenhouse at her ranch in Huffman. Mrs. Sanders and Mr. Opperman both raise tomatoes and peppers from seed starting about the first of the year. By doing this the school is able to grow some varieties that are not normally available at garden centers and the garden is able to save money versus buying transplants. Don't tell the weatherman, but several plants have already been planted in the garden. This is always risky in February, but if a late freeze gets them, there are dozens more ready to be planted. Did you know that the tomato is the most grown plant in home gardens? When the volunteers discuss tomatoes in class with the students, there are always several dozen who say they don't like tomatoes. They are reminded that catsup, pizza sauce, and spaghetti sauce are all made from tomatoes. Also if they have only eaten tomatoes from a store, they really don't know what a real tomato from the garden tastes like.

It was a good harvest day last Thursday. In addition to the sugar snap peas, cauliflower, cabbage, kohlrabi, broccoli, lettuce, carrots, turnips, radishes, mizuna, kale, and French sorrel were sent home with students. The next fruit to be harvested will be the loquats. Many people have loquat trees in their yards, but do not harvest the tasty fruits. While they are small and do have several seeds, they are very sweet and some say they taste much like apricots. If your student brings some home in the next few weeks, give them a try. Then again, sometimes students eat them before they make it home.

Planting of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade tree on February 28<sup>th</sup> at 1:30 PM is on schedule. Barring heavy rain that day, the 15<sup>th</sup> fifth grade tree will be planted on the south side of the building near the track. This year the tree is a Chinkapin Oak. It is currently in a 30 gallon pot and should grow to be 50 to 70 feet tall eventually. Will 5<sup>th</sup> graders still be playing on the playground nearby 50 years from now when this tree is mature? Eighty one percent of the 5<sup>th</sup> graders earned at least \$3 or worked during recess in the school to earn a scholarship. These 121 students will enjoy a dessert party provided by the garden volunteers prior to the tree planting. We are so proud of all these students who earned their money to pay for the tree that they are donating to the school.

A team of students will be digging the hole for the tree on Monday, February 25<sup>th</sup>. We always welcome help in supervising and helping with the "big dig". Parents and grandparents, if you want to help just sent a note to [hoppergo@aol.com](mailto:hoppergo@aol.com). We will let you know the details.

This Thursday, we expect the director of Urban Harvest to visit the school gardens and a class. The school garden is a member of Urban Harvest and has received help and gardening education from this non-profit in the past. In addition to school gardens and Farmers' Markets, Urban Harvest also has vast knowledge of what works in your gardens at home. Check them out at: [www.urbanharvest.org](http://www.urbanharvest.org)

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 welcome 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. Donations can be sent to: OFE Growers, PO Box 1525, Kingwood, TX 77325. We appreciate your donations to help fund the gardening program. And yes, think of the value of all those groceries your students bring home.

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) Some teachers even give extra credit to students who are the first to answer questions posted on the web site.