

Unfortunately, the rain on Thursday wiped out outside gardening last week. There was a lot that needed to be harvested though, so the volunteers braved the cold and rain and several inches of water on the paths in the garden to harvest what was ready. Each student in Mrs. Smart's classes got a bag of groceries. All other 5th grade classes got an orange and perhaps something else. It was a good citrus year as many of the trees in the orchard are nearing maturity. Already they are blooming with next fall and winter crops. Other items harvested were lettuce, kale, broccoli, radishes, herbs, turnips, and mizuna. Mrs. Sanders discussed Cole crops and also worked a math problem in class. If the weather holds, we will start the sugar cane harvest this week. That's always a favorite activity of the fifth graders. Students will be able to take home a section of cane with at least one node on it. They have the choice to peel it and suck the sweet juice, or plant it in a container and watch it grow. If planted, the node should be facing up. Don't plant it in the ground just yet, wait until the weather warms a bit.

While we may have freezing temperatures this week, spring is definitely beginning to show on campus. Robins are hopping all over the athletic fields. The blue bird house in the oak tree by the back entrance was reattached to the tree. Most birds will be mating soon. Nesting boxes are mounted in a number of areas around campus. We always look forward to the chatty Purple Martins that live in the big white house in the corner of the garden. Mrs. McKinney has been releasing newly hatched monarch butterflies at the school and just this past weekend a Palamedes swallowtail butterfly was seen in the orchard.

The students have been studying cole crops. When we talk about cole crops people sometimes think we are talking about cold crops, and cole crops do grow in cool or cold weather. Lower temperatures are the only similarity, though, and the two words mean different things. We all know what cold means, but cole is certainly not a familiar term for most people. Cole refers to any plant belonging to the Brassicaceae family. The word cole comes from the Latin word for cabbage, *caulis*. There are lots of different cole crops. They originated with wild cabbage in the Mediterranean region. Here is a list of the most common ones: cabbage, broccoli, bok choy, cauliflower, kale, Brussels sprouts, collards, kohlrabi, mustard, arugula and turnips. Generally, with a cole crop, what you see is what you eat. The exception is a turnip; its root and leaves are eaten.

Cole crops are somewhat cold tolerant, and will not freeze during a light frost. That is why you see lots of them this time of year in the student's grocery bag. However, like many other plants, they prefer warmer weather and grow faster in sunshine and temperatures of 60 degrees to 70 degrees F. They will not grow well when temperatures are consistently above 70 degrees F.

Have you walked around the south side of the school to take a look at the new 5th grade tree? If not, pictures are already on the web site: <http://www.ofegrowers.org/arbor-day.html>. Take a look! Emily Fortner is on maternity leave and in her absence brooke.smart@humbleisd.net, the Vice President of the Growers organization, would be happy to hear from you with any suggestions or comments. You can also leave a comment on the Growers web site: www.ofegrowers.org.

If you are still cleaning up your yard of leaves and pine needles and you are not going to use them for mulching or composting, consider bringing them to school. We use hundreds of bags each year for mulching and composting. Mulched leaves and pine needles are much appreciated. Drop them at the far end of the east parking lot back by the water tower.

Take a break this weekend or any evening and stop at the school to take a look at the lovely winter gardens and the new tree, compliments of the 5th grade class of 2020! And as mentioned above, Spring is breaking out all over.