

Last week, due to testing on Tuesday, Mrs. Harisis' class was postponed until this week. On Thursday, however, the students in Mrs. Keys' classes, who is substituting for Mrs. Fortner, did get a chance to garden. It was a busy day with lots to harvest as the weather, testing and days off have cut the students' time in the gardens short. In the classroom, Mrs. Sanders discussed Cole Crops. Students were introduced to some they had never eaten before and were challenged to try those that were going home in the grocery bags. Do you know what Kohlrabi is?

Always a fun harvest is that of the sugar cane stand at the back of the main garden. Each student was given 2 or 3 sections including several nodes. Students are always told they can either eat their sugar cane or plant it at home for future enjoyment. Sugar Cane is covered on page 30 in the gardening manual if you would like to know more about it. Sugarland, TX was once the sugar capital of the US. We are continuing that harvest with the three classes this week. We anticipate we will have an excess and if anyone wants more than their student brings home, we will put a bucket in the front entry. Help yourself. Students enjoyed sampling the piece that was given to them in class. It is sort of like chewing gum and after extracting the sweet juice they were told they could spit the rest into the compost bin. Did you know that sugar cane is a grass?

Next to the sugar cane we had three giant cotton plants and had already sent cotton bolls home with students last fall. Each boll has many seeds inside. A team of students planted one or two seeds in three-inch pots with compost from the garden. Cotton is a beautiful plant and we anticipate we will have enough little plants for anyone who wants one by late April or May. Ask if you would like to have one. Cotton would normally freeze but has not this year and continues producing.

We are behind on planting spring tomatoes as we did have a mild freeze last week. The crops in the gardens were not harmed as it did not get cold enough for long enough to do any damage. If we had already planted tomato plants, they would not have survived. Normally after March 1, our area does not experience freezing temperatures. A big priority this week will be to get them in the ground so students will be able to harvest them before the end of the school year. Shortly, towards the end of March, students will be planting, peppers, eggplant, squash, pole beans and okra

This week, Mrs. Opperman will begin teaching the soil lesson on pages 11 and 12 of the gardening manual. Students will learn that without good soil, there is a very little chance that any kind of gardening will be successful. Students will also learn the difference between soil and dirt. We work hard to have excellent soil in our gardens. Through composting and mulching we return most of the organic matter from the gardens back into the soil renewing life in the soil year after year.

If you are still cleaning up your yard of leaves and pine needles, first consider using the materials in your yard, but if 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 often a wasted natural resource being sent to the landfill. 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 5th grade tree, compliments of the 5th grade class of 2020! Spring is breaking out all over campus. Take a look at the pictures from Arbor Day a few weeks ago.

<http://www.ofegrowers.org/arbor-day.html>. And as always there are other pictures of the students in action in the gardens.

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.