

We know everyone is happy to be back at OFE after spring break. The students have had an extra long break from gardening first due to a rain out three weeks ago, then the planting of their tree two weeks ago and finally spring break last week. Lots of things have happened in the gardens since they last stepped foot into the gardens.

Before we get you up to date about what is happening in the gardens, lets talk about the 2019 Fifth Grade tree. After the rain delay on February 28<sup>th</sup>, the tree finally landed in its designated spot on the play ground on March 7<sup>th</sup>. Again, as the students held their dedication ceremony and began to plant the tree, rain started to fall, but undeterred, the students and the volunteers persevered to get the job done. It was only a passing shower and determination won out! The new Chinkapin Oak is in place and already is showing new leaves. The students should be able to come back in 30 or 40 years to find a very tall (50 foot) stately oak. Great job, class of 2019! You can go to the web site and see lots of pictures of the event.

<http://www.ofegrowers.org/arbor-day.html> The first pictures are of the dessert party given to the students for achieving their goal of earning the money for the tree.

No students have been gardening for the last several weeks due to rainy weather, the tree planting and of course, spring break. That of course meant that the volunteers pitched in and harvested what needed to be picked. This included a bumper crop of sugar snap peas among other things. Those need to be picked every several days in order for the plants to keep producing. Many of the cole family plants are starting to bolt, that is, sprout flower stalks. At that point, the leaves typically become rather tough. With the earlier warmer weather, bolting started a bit sooner than we have seen in other years. Many of the flowers of these plants are edible as well, and add an added interest to food. For instance, if your student brings home broccoli that is also in flower, use it like you would the unopened buds. We are allowing some of the cole crops to go to flower to offer pollen and nectar to our pollinating insects. This will draw the insects into the garden, and they will hopefully also pollinate our vegetable and fruit crops.

We have already planted quite a few tomatoes in the garden, as well as tomatillos. We will wait another week or so before the peppers go into the garden. Mrs. Sanders and Mr. Opperman have also grown from seed, many of the peppers that will be planted by the students.

The acorns that the students planted in January, have grown too large for their three inch pots, and had to be transplanted into one gallon containers. Once the students are back in the garden, they will transplant the rest of the little oak trees. These will be beautiful little trees by May. You will be able to adopt one.

Speaking of going to flower, the orchard is in full bloom. The citrus trees are loaded with buds and flowers which are perfuming the whole school grounds. We are pleased to see a fair number of bees and bumblebees on the trees, so we are starting to count our pears, oranges, lemons, grapefruit, and kumquats already, barring anything unforeseen. The loquats made it through the freezes with minor damage, so the crop of fruit is quite plentiful. Those should be ready in a few weeks.

With the fruit trees blooming, we are also seeing butterflies flying around taking advantage of the great nectar supply. Mrs. McKinney has raised many butterflies over the winter months from eggs or caterpillars that she collected from the school grounds. Quite a few have come out of their chrysalides and are starting the cycle all over again. Many of the monarch butterflies that overwintered in Mexico are starting to show up. They will lay eggs which will start the next generation that will fly further north. Speaking of creatures returning from the south, the purple martin scouts are back and reclaiming their houses on the school grounds. We love their cheerful chatter as we garden.

The OFE Growers is a group of parents, grandparents, teachers, 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.