

Growers News for the Week of March 26, 2018

On a Chamber of Commerce day last Thursday, Ms. Warnack's students enjoyed gardening. The cool season crops are slowly coming to an end and warm season crops are still being planted. Lettuce is very abundant right now, but will not last too long with the warm days ahead. Radishes, kale, Swiss chard, collards, carrots, broccoli, and sorrel were harvested and sent home with the students. Lots of sugar snap peas were picked as well. These need to be picked every two days to keep them productive. So, on weekends and on Tuesdays, they are picked by volunteers and stored for the students to take home on Thursdays.

A team of students worked with Mrs. Opperman to tidy the large Monarch Watch bed by the portables. Pentas were also planted. These make great pollinator plants and are visited by butterflies and bees alike. More plants such as bee balm, porterweed and purple coneflowers will be planted this week. Both are excellent sources of nectar and pollen. Students will be able to take home potted up flower plants that have been rescued from the gardens. Most of the plants that will be given away need full sun and periodic watering if it does not rain. Tags with directions will accompany the plants. Most of the plants are also excellent pollinator plants. Encourage your student in planting them, provided you have the right spot for them. From the pumpkin smash in December, the students saved seeds and planted them about a month ago in 3 inch pots with their compost. If you have room for a pumpkin plant in your backyard, ask your student to bring one home.

Several teams planted more peppers in the orchard. Mr. Langridge trimmed grape vines, while Mr. Opperman emptied more bags of leaves that had been dropped off by the paper retriever. We are now asking that no more bags of leaves be brought to the school. We have enough! Unfortunately, some people in the community have begun to use the area as a dump for their yard trash. This makes for a lot of work for our volunteers and is not useful to the gardening program.

This week Mrs. Keifer will discuss pollination with the students. It is important to understand how pollination works and the many ways plants are pollinated. Of course, our insect pollinators are hugely important in pollinating our food crops. Many are in peril and we need to do whatever we can to help them out. The biggest threat to them is the indiscriminate use of insecticides as well as habitat loss. As gardeners we need to use only the least toxic forms of insecticides or use other means of getting rid of problem insects. We can also plant many plants that will benefit them.

Okra, beans, cucumbers and more squash will be planted this week. A new Meyer lemon tree will also be planted to replace one that did not make it through the winter freeze. It was donated to the gardens by volunteer, Mrs. Allen. We are grateful for her gift. Lemons are prized by the students and volunteers alike.

The OFE Growers love volunteers! Now is a great time for 4th grade parents and grandparents to join us as volunteers for next year. Let us know if you would like to help and to learn to garden at the same time. Mrs. Krenek is our president. Do talk to her or send her an e-mail at: deborah.krenek@humbleisd.net, if you have questions. You can also learn about the OFE Growers and see pictures of the students in action in the gardens by going to their web site at: www.ofegrowers.org. The web site is constantly changing. Recently a complete layout of the newly repositioned gardens was added. Pictures from the Arbor Day tree planting are also available along with hundreds of pictures taken in the gardens this school year. <http://www.ofegrowers.org/garden-layouts.html>.

Let's all show our Falcon Pride by eliminating litter on campus and recycling as many items as we can. It makes our campus shine! If everyone picks up one piece of litter daily we will be spotless! Have you recycled your soda can or water bottle and picked up a piece of litter today. Be an example! If you don't, who will? Please also bring your cardboard and paper including junk mail, newspapers and magazines to the school. The paper retriever in the east parking lot is waiting to be filled. Did you know the school makes money based on the pounds of good recyclable paper and cardboard put into that bin?