

Growers News for the Week of April 2, 2018

Last Thursday was a beautiful day in the gardens, as the heavy rains overnight had cleared and the sky was dark blue. Our rain gauge indicated we got 3.2 inches of rain overnight. That was just what the fast growing plants in the gardens needed. We do have a means of watering the gardens when there is no rain, but to the extent possible we try to use rainwater either that we have saved in our rain catching devices or directly falling from the sky. Rain water has no fluorides or chlorides added to it. While those are added to tap water to keep us safe, they do kill off many beneficial microbes in the soil and in the compost heap. For this reason, always use untreated water on your plants, if you can.

After over three inches of rain, however, the gardens were wet. With 30+ students per class and ten or so volunteers the pathways get a bit squishy. While we collect pine straw to keep them clean and dry, at this time of year our supply is running low. That is why we ask parents never to throw away pine needles. We use hundreds of bags around the school yards each year. We have asked that no more bags be dropped along the east parking area this year. However, we still would love pure pine needles if you still have them.

It is butterfly and bird watching time on campus. Seen on campus this past week were blue birds, purple martins, hawks, cardinals, and many other more common birds. While we have not observed the chimney swifts, we suspect they are back using the tower built for the school by the crew at the Kingwood Country Club. These birds can only be observed very early in the morning leaving the tower and very late in the evening coming back after a day of collection/eating insects including mosquitoes around campus. Our resident butterfly expert, Mrs. McKinney is busy raising new butterflies. She collects eggs and caterpillars around campus, raises them at her home and then releases them on campus. Her success rate is much better than if they were left to hatch in nature where many of them would succumb to predators. Recently she has raised various swallowtails and monarchs.

Teams of students harvested sugar snap peas, lettuce, collards, carrots, spinach, radishes, lots of herbs, and a few other misc. vegetables. Okra, cucumbers, beans, a few more peppers, and some additional tomatoes were planted. Planting is almost over for this school year with the exception of sweet potatoes which will be planted in mid May.

Mrs. Keifer is discussing pollination with the students. It is important to understand how pollination works and the many ways plants are pollinated. Our insect pollinators are so important in pollinating our food crops. Well over 30% of our food supply depends on insects to pollinate plants that we eat. Many insects including honey bees 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 grow many plants that will benefit them.

The OFE Growers love volunteers! Now is the 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. 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. **On May 24th at 4 PM the OFE Growers will have their annual meeting. Please attend if you would like to offer input into how we function next year or if you have any questions..**

Let's all show our Falcon Pride by eliminating litter on campus and recycling as many items as we can. 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? Clean plastic bottles and aluminum cans are recyclable in the bin by the school dumpster. No plastic bags please. And do put paper and cardboard in the Paper Retriever along the fence. No glass please.