

Growers News for the Week of April 8, 2018

In the gardens last week, the students enjoyed another beautiful spring day. They do love their half hour in the gardens every other week. The stresses of the STAAR test preparation were left behind and they truly were able to be “kids” again for a half hour. Amazingly they think they are having fun but in reality they are getting a feel for the real world of nature and all the ways it relates to everything else they will have to do as they grow into teens and adults.

Students planted okra and a few other things. They also fed most of the growing plants in the gardens. Teams used liquid seaweed to spray on the leaves of many of the plants. This all organic fertilizer is absorbed through the leaves and gives the plants a quick shot of nitrogen and other essential nutrients. Other teams of students used granular MicroLife organic fertilizer mixed into the surface of the soil. As rain and irrigation wash these nutrients down to the roots of the plants, the roots will take it up and feed the whole plant. We are able to equate feeding the plants properly with the students feeding themselves properly. Yes, we could feed the plants cheap chemical fertilizers and the plant wouldn't necessarily care. In the same way students can be fed junk food and the body works just fine **for a while**. Over time though, the price must be paid if the body is not fed properly. In the gardens, the soil pays the price if cheap fertilizers and pesticides are used and the soil is not fed properly. Once the soil is “poisoned” it takes many years for it to regain its vitality to grow healthy plants and also healthy food.

Harvests have been good the past few weeks with students harvesting sugar snap peas, lettuce, collards, carrots, radishes, lots of herbs, and a few other misc. vegetables. Already the potatoes are blooming, small golf ball size tomatoes are on the plants, onions are starting to bulb, and small peppers are showing up. This week we should be able to harvest our first squash and loquats.

Mrs. Keifer discussed pollination with the students the past two weeks. 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 and home owners we need to use only the least toxic forms of insecticides or use other means of getting rid of problem insects. Sometimes it is best to just live with pest weeds and insects instead of spraying poison all over.

This week Mrs. Sanders, a retired HS math teacher will be sharing “Yes, there is math in the garden” with the students in class. These are practical problems that everyone should know how to solve when dealing with a garden or yard.

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. We do need parent input, physical, and financial help if the gardening program at OFE is to continue.

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.