

Composting continued in the main garden last week with about half of bin one being moved to bin two. Most students love the concept and the physical work of moving the materials from one bin to the next. They are always amazed that the billions of tiny micro-organisms can decompose all that “stuff” in just a few months. They learn, too, that their compost is about the best fertilizer you can find. It has been heated in the pile to as much as 140 degrees F. This school year they will have made about a ton of compost in the bins by the shed and if they were to buy a comparable product it would cost about \$12 for a forty pound bag. All this from leaves, dead plants, grass clippings, kitchen scraps, discarded fruit and vegetables and used soil, all things that most people just send to the landfill. Mrs. Sanders’ horses also contribute to the compost occasionally.

Another batch of sugar snap pea plants were removed from the main garden last week and that process will continue again this week. They are cool season crops and have produced well for the past few months. As temperatures heat up, they begin to die back and stop producing. In their place will go the long beans. These beans love the summer heat and will climb the fences just like the peas did during the winter. Tomatoes are growing quickly and already are blooming and producing little green tomatoes. Peppers, eggplant, long beans and squash have all been planted and some of the seeds have already germinated.

Last Thursday an untimely shower came along just at 2 PM as one of the classes was set to go outside to tend their crops and to harvest. About 35 students were very disappointed. But we can’t control the weather. A group of volunteers worked outside in the rain for that hour and managed to put together bags of produce for all the students before they left for the day. Mrs. Opperman did cover pollination in the classroom. If you are interested, the current lesson from the gardening manual is always available on our web site:

[http://www.ofegrowers.org/uploads/8/7/5/2/87524472/pollination\\_pgs\\_31\\_32.pdf](http://www.ofegrowers.org/uploads/8/7/5/2/87524472/pollination_pgs_31_32.pdf)

Students are always urged to fill in the blanks as the lesson is taught. Many of these questions will no doubt find their way onto a final science exam. In the morning class, students were able to clear some of the beds, harvest peas and some beautiful broccoli. The loquat tree is loaded but the freeze we had in March did ruin some of the fruit. Nevertheless, the students were able to pick some and most students tasted them as they were harvesting. The general consensus was that loquats are very good! Another group of students harvested our last batch of radishes for this spring. It is getting too hot for radishes to grow well.

For the next few weeks, students will be tending the rapidly growing plants making sure they have enough water and fertilizer supplements. An equally important task this time of year is control of weeds. A big weed can take more than its share of nutrients and moisture from the ground near a desirable plant. We strive to never let the weeds get big in the school gardens. Covering the soil with mulched leaves, newly mowed grass, or pine needles usually does the trick although a few weeds will sprout even with mulch. Eagle eyed students are assigned to look for and eliminate weeds before they become a problem. Lettuce, spinach, radishes, collards, and a few other plants are also approaching the end of their life cycle. Since these are annuals, they will be missing from the gardens until next year’s students replant them in the fall.

Over the past few weeks, students have repotted all the little oak trees into gallon pots. They are growing nicely along the fence in the main garden. If all these trees are adopted and planted, Atascocita will become an oak forest. Last week, students planted pumpkin seeds in small pots. This planting will continue this week. These seeds were saved from the pumpkins that decorated the gardens up until January when students smashed the pumpkins and put their remains into the compost bins. Each student will be able to take home a pumpkin plant in about a month. Can you already taste the pumpkin pie?

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. More importantly we consider the molding of the students to be team players and responsible citizens as our most important task. 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.

Don’t forget to take a look at the new content on our web site: [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org). There you will find all the latest pictures from the gardens. Pictures are taken each week showing the students in action, the latest being on April 11th. After viewing the pictures, take a look at the “Board” for experiments. Also there are interesting pictures of plants that were allowed to “bolt” or to flower and then go to seed. Normally students and gardeners do not get to see this process since we pick the plant before that happens.