

Growers News for the Week of May 21, 2018

Gardening classes are over for the school year. This week the students are meeting with the gardener volunteers for the last time in the classroom where they will have a special presentation on bees. There are hundreds of types of bees in Texas; however, the ones that most of us think of are honey bees when we think of bees. Bees are an important part of our food supply. Up to 35% of the food we eat is dependent on bees to do the hard work of pollination. Without bees we might starve.

We have had a great group of garden volunteers this year! Most of us have volunteered for this program since we love working with plants. An added bonus at OFE is the inspiration and enthusiasm the students give to us each week. Yes, we occasionally get to take home some of the garden produce, but normally it all goes to the students. Another benefit of being a garden volunteer at OFE is the heart felt "thank yous" we get from the students. Each year they write notes and letters to us telling us how much they have enjoyed the experiences and the things we have taught them. Some of them even say that gardening has been the best experience in elementary school. We love to hear that. Some of the notes are enough to make an old gardener tear up.

Gardening is not without its challenges. There are lots of creatures that always want to share in the garden produce. The OFE gardens are proof positive that gardening can be successful in Atascocita.. The students will have raised over 3000 pounds of food in their gardens the past 9 months. During the summer another thousand pounds or so will be harvested and some turned into preserves by the volunteers. The donations given for these preserves help to make the gardens a self perpetuating program. Amazingly we do not use any of the pesticides or herbicides that are advertised heavily. We also do not use chemical fertilizers. We are all organic! Do stop by the gardens this spring or summer to see the compost bins where students make over a ton of compost each year saving lots of leaves, dead plants, grass, and vegetable scraps from going to the landfill.

Fifth grade students have been given their final gardening test in the past two weeks. The test is an open book test, so there is no reason not to score 100. They also have taken their gardening manual home. We hope that parents and grandparents will look through the booklet and think about starting a home garden or planting a fruit tree. Parents and children working together on a home project like building and planting a garden is a great bonding experience. If you need help getting started, why not bring your child to school this summer. The Growers volunteers will be at the gardens every Thursday morning from 9 to about 10:30. If you want to learn or just help, come join us. There is a big payoff in free produce if you come and work for at least an hour. The harvested produce is always divided between those who show up to work. Fourth and Fifth grade students took home a letter last Thursday with all the details. Come join us this summer.

We would love to welcome you as a volunteer for next year. If you can't help, maybe you know someone who could. We do need parent, grandparent, and community volunteers to keep the gardens going. Mrs. Krenek has been our president for the past so many years. We're happy for her that she is retiring at the end of this year but we will miss her very much. She has built a strong program and we are confident that it will continue to be a part of OFE for years to come. She tells us she will be back as a volunteer! If you have questions, you can still contact her. You can also learn all 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. A big "thank you" to Karen Langridge! She developed the web site and has maintained it in the past few years. Karen, too, is retiring from this volunteer position at the end of the school year. Job well done, Karen! Anne Mitchell will be following in her footsteps as web master.

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 school 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. The OFE Growers is a non-profit organization with no funding from the school district. On May 31, the Growers will treat the students to a harvest celebration with goodies primarily from the gardens. It is always one of the best days of the year!