

The first week of gardening with Mrs. Smart's two classes was last Thursday. This week we will meet with Mrs. Fortner's classes. All fifth grade students spend an hour once every two weeks with the Growers volunteers.

The classes are repeated on two week cycles and all 5<sup>th</sup> graders are scheduled into one of these four periods. Emphasis is on science and math. We often are told that most students enjoy their gardening experiences and think of it as being a fun time even though they are learning in a hands on way. During this two week cycle, we spend time orienting them to what they will be doing and our expectations of them. Much to their dismay the first two sessions are held in the classroom. They will be given a pictorial tour of the campus, a safety lesson, and be advised about good gardening practices. There will be demonstrations on how to use tools, plant seeds and seedlings, and work in the compost area. Once they begin working outside (when it is a bit cooler) they will begin learning and experimenting by "doing."

These first two rotations will cover the first eight pages of their gardening manual. Normally they will be assigned one or two pages for each gardening session. Their manual will remain in school, but the upcoming lessons will be displayed on the web site where they can read ahead and parents can follow along if they wish. So, put an icon on your home computer for [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org) to follow the lessons and see pictures of the students in action each week as they tend and harvest their crops.

A few of the questions last week from students were: Do we grow pumpkins? The answer is yes and no. Ask you student the answer. Do we get to take food home? Yes, almost all the crops grown during the school year are divided among the students that garden that day. Last year that was over 2000 pounds. Do we get to take some home today? No, you haven't planted anything so far. How soon will we start getting things to take home? It depends on the weather but our first big crop will be radishes and then sweet potatoes. Last year the fifth graders planted them in May for you and they have been growing all summer. We hope to have seven or eight hundred pounds this year.

During the summer, the garden keeps on producing. We always invite students and their parents to come on Thursday mornings to help with the harvesting and weeding. We had lots of help this past summer and anyone putting in a few hours is encouraged to take any of the harvest home. In addition much of the produce is canned and preserved. The Growers use the proceeds to fund the gardening program. Parents are encouraged to order preserves. The donations for the preserves goes a long way to fund the gardening program and is much appreciated. The web site, see above, has an up-to-date inventory of the product that is still available. Go to the web site and click on contact/produce inventory for ordering information.

We are a diverse group of mostly retired people. We would love to have any parents, grandparents, or community members give us a hand in maintaining the gardening program at the school. The OFE Growers are a 501-c-3 all volunteer non-profit organization. Emily Fortner is one of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade science and math teachers and is the president of the Growers organization. If you would like to join a fun group of garden volunteers running this program, get in touch with Mrs. Fortner to get started. You need not be a vegetable gardener. Actually, you can keep your hands clean by helping keep up our database created last year to keep records to help in our gardening efforts. You could also be our web master. (See above) Volunteer, Denton Langridge, our interim web master, would love some help. Are you good at photography? We can use a photographer as well. We supply the camera. You would have to attend classes on Thursdays to catch students in action. Give Mrs. Fortner a call 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.