

Students in Mrs. Fortner's classes had their orientation to gardening class last week. On this the second part of a two week cycle, students were introduced to the garden volunteers, were given a quick tour of the garden facilities via a Power Point presentation, were taught the many safety requirements of working in the gardens, and were told of the "good garden practices" they must observe while working in the garden. Mrs. Krenek, who was a fifth grade teacher until last spring when she retired and who started the gardening program some fifteen years ago, participated as a volunteer for the first time.

This week and next all the students will be exposed to more "in classroom" training to prepare them for their first outdoor gardening experiences beginning on September 27. There will be demonstrations on how to use tools, plant seeds and transplants, and composting. Once they begin working outside (when it is a bit cooler) they will begin learning and experimenting by "doing. While the students are a bit disappointed that they are not going to the garden their first two classes, it is important that they know some of the fundamentals before heading outside.

The volunteers have been impressed by the serious questions that students have asked the past two weeks and look forward to growing and experimenting with them in the coming months. To jump start some of the crops and hasten the first harvests for the students, the volunteers have already planted radishes, carrots, and lettuce seeds. In addition, some tomato and pepper plants have been transplanted into the gardens. Some tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, okra, sweet potatoes, and various herbs are still growing from spring plantings. With the hot conditions and lack of rain the past month, it has taken constant care to keep them growing.

The summer garden produced lots of figs, grapes, tomatoes, peppers, pickles and okra. During the school year all produce goes home with students. In the summer some of it is preserved by the volunteers to be used as "Donations for Preserves" a fundraising project used to fund the gardens. If you will go to the web site, [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org), and click on "contact/produce inventory", you can avail yourself of some preserves and help keep this program going by donating. While on the website, take a look at pictures from last week's classes and other information about the gardening program at OFE.

The Growers will also be set up in the front hall for Grandparents Day. You may sample our preserves while choosing ones you might wish to take home for a donation. Pictures of our gardens will be on display, with several volunteers who would enjoy sharing the details of our program with you.

As 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.

You can also donate to the program by saving your clean plastic grocery bags and sending them to the school with a 5<sup>th</sup> grader. We use them to send home fruit and vegetables grown in the gardens. We also use a couple thousand bags of clean leaves and pine needles around campus for mulching and composting. Don't send them to the landfill; drop them off by the sign on the east parking lot. Thanks!