

Growers News for the Week of October 2, 2017

Student orientation to the gardens is almost complete and now the real work for the students begins. On Thursday we will complete the orientation with Mrs. Krenek's morning class since they were rained out two weeks ago. After their tour of the gardens they will be working for a half hour planting cole plants, weeding, and preparing beds for more planting. The afternoon class that did have their tour will spend their half hour outside planting and preparing for planting. Always one team works at the shed and another works with the compost bins. As time allows occasionally a team is sent out to work on the nature areas around the school. Before going outside a classroom session is held with the Growers volunteers to explain what will be happening outside that day and to instill the need for being safe in everything they do while in the gardens.

We are pleased that several new volunteers have joined us this year. Since the students are new to the gardening program and also a few of the volunteers, there will be lots of new rules and new skills to learn. Learning through doing is what the gardening program is all about. Math and science are emphasized. You can't be a good gardener without understanding these skills. One of the resources given to the students to help them learn about gardening and nature is the OFE Student Gardening Manual. Over 14 years, the volunteers at Oak Forest have compiled the information in this manual to guide the students through their year in the gardens. At the end of the year they will take this manual home for their future use. Many students ask their parents to give them a plot in the backyard for their own personal garden. This manual can help you do this and is available for a donation of \$5 to cover the cost of printing. Let your teacher know if you would like one.

The "in class" lesson this week will cover pages 7 and 8 and will cover the topics of Safety and Good Garden Practices. In the many years of gardening at OFE there never has been a serious safety issue. The volunteers will emphasize this often during the first few weeks and anytime they see an unsafe act. There is no toleration for accidents! Safety is NO ACCIDENT! Parents can also emphasize this by making sure their students wear appropriate clothing on garden days. We will never let a child go into the garden with open-toe shoes.

This week in the garden we expect to find our first fall crop. A few of the radishes planted a month ago are ready to harvest. There may still be a bit of produce from the summer gardens available, too. Most students will not get to take anything home this week, but if your student does bring something home, treat it like gold. They are always very proud of their output and if you treat it like anything else you buy at the store, and then make a fuss over how good it tastes you will be amazed at the things they will begin to eat. Our produce is all organic and tastes so much better than most things that come from the store. To save money we ask that you save plastic grocery bags and send them in with your students.

The OFE Growers are an all volunteer non-profit organization created specifically to fund and administer the gardens and nature programs at the school. Mrs. Krenek is our president. She envisioned this "hands-on" approach to learning science and math over 15 years ago. If you have questions or comments on the programs of the Growers, do talk with her or send her an e-mail at: deborah.krenek@humbleisd.net. You can also learn about the OFE Growers and see pictures of them in action by going to their web site at: www.ofegrowers.org.

Each fall we ask that parents bring bags of leaves and pine needles to the school for the students to use in making compost and mulching the trees and vegetables in the gardens. We ask that only clean material be dropped off along the east side parking lot near the cedar fence. We love pure pine needles, mulched leaves, and even a mulched mixture of grass, leaves and pine needles. Do not make the bags too heavy! Remember a 5th grader is not as strong as you. Do exclude any brush or heavy branches and also any material that has been sprayed recently with an herbicide or pesticide. We are all organic in the OFE gardens.