

Growers News for the Week of October 16, 2017

It has been 45 days since the big flood and rain event hit our area. The school got over 30 inches of rain that week but very little since. In fact, with the exceptional heat of the last few weeks and no rain, our gardens are almost in a drought situation. Normally students would be taking lettuce home at this point and carrots would already be forming underground. That is not happening this year although we have been able to harvest some radishes and several of our summer crops are still producing. Ms. Warnack's students were able to take home a harvest last Thursday including, tomatoes, peppers, egg plant, radishes, beans, okra, and several types of herbs.

The sweet potato harvest begins this week. This is always an exciting time for the students since it is their first big harvest. While the current 5th graders did not plant these sweet potatoes they will enjoy the work of last year's class who planted them in May just before school was out for the summer. Sweet potatoes love the hot summer and do a great job of covering the soil keeping weeds from sprouting in the beds. By now, the little 3 inch sets have grown into monstrous plants that cover the fence in front of the orchard and the whole garden area in the annex behind the kindergarten wing of the school. We expect to be able to send several nice potatoes home with each 5th grade student. Four varieties of sweet potatoes were planted last May, including Beauregard, Centennials, Vardaman and a white-fleshed variety with purple skin called Murasaki. This last one is from Japan and is reputedly resistant to many of our sweet potato diseases. It is best to hold the potato for a few weeks before using it as this allows the sugars to develop in the potato. They are best if kept in a relatively cool and dark place in the house, but not refrigerated. Did you know that sweet potatoes are not true potatoes, but rather members of the morning glory family? They are also not a yam, which is a starchy tuber that belongs to an entirely different plant family.

Students will begin their adventures with composting in class this week. During the course of the year they will make over a ton of compost in the bins next to the little red shed. In addition they will use hundreds of bags of leaves and pine needles to mulch the trees around campus. Mr. Langridge will be giving them the formula for compost. Yes, over time all organic materials do decompose; however, with composting we accelerate the process so we can use this nutrient rich material in the gardens. Scientifically composting is part of the carbon cycle. With the proper mixture of carbon, nitrogen, air, water, and micro organisms, the decomposition process can be speeded up significantly. We believe our compost is a great fertilizer for our plants.

Do bring us your pine needles, mulched leaves, and weed free newly mown grass clippings. Drop your bags on the east side of the school near the water tower. There is a sign there telling you where to drop them. We can also use your plastic grocery store shopping bags. They are used to send vegetables home with the 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. New pictures of this year's students in the gardens are available now by going to the web site and clicking on: photos from the classroom gardens. By clicking on news, you can follow what is happening in the gardens each week.