

Gardening has gotten off to a slow start this year. While school started a week earlier than usual, the enduring hot weather during the first few weeks was not ideal for gardening. Then along came Imelda. Another week was lost. Last week was October break for the students causing another delay in planting and getting fall crops growing. Finally, this week Mrs. Harisis and Mrs. Fortner's students will get their long-delayed tour of the gardening facilities and begin their first week of getting their hands (or gloves) dirty working in the gardens. More seeds of sugar snap peas and radishes will be planted. It is also time to plant lettuce, spinach, carrots, and beets.

Gardening does not take a break as the fall rain and cooler temperatures require that certain things be planted at a time when there still is enough sunshine and warmth to grow plants before winter temperatures shut them down or at least slow them down. Consequently, some of the volunteers have planted cabbage, broccoli, kale, collards, and cauliflower. Most of these plants also known as cole crops, are available now in garden centers. Although, we understand that due to the extra warm early fall, some of the commercial growers had crop failure. We have found it difficult this year to find quality transplants.

Many of the things we grow in the gardens are grown from seed. A transplant at the garden center will typically cost at least \$2 in a small 3-inch pot. For about the same cost you can buy a whole packet of seeds which might plant 50 or even 100 seedlings. We do use transplants for some crops only because we are able to harvest much more quickly if the plant is already partially growing and we don't have to wait for germination and a month to get the tiny seedlings up to transplant size.

We sometimes buy our seeds from a wholesale seed company and are able to save money by buying in large quantities. We typically sow over 100 feet of sugar snap peas, for instance. A seed packet from a garden center will usually only grow about a ten foot row. Sometimes we are lucky though and are offered free seeds by a local garden center. This year the Kingwood Garden Center gave us about 75 seed packets, saving us \$150 if purchased at retail.

The garden is still producing okra, long beans, peppers, and eggplant. These will continue for a bit longer, but harvests are small. A few of the radishes planted about a month ago are ready this week. Due to the hot weather up until this week, they are not as good as they will be as it cools a bit more. Harvested produce is bagged by the students. Teachers then distribute the bags to students. Our first big harvest will be sweet potatoes in a couple weeks. We will also have a limited number of mandarin oranges this week. We are disappointed that many of our citrus are splitting or rotting right on the branches of the trees. This is no doubt due to the extremely high temperatures followed by excessive rain. They do not look like the oranges you find in the stores which are often dyed orange to increase their appeal. Our fruit will be somewhat green looking, but will have a sweet, juicy flesh.

Do go to the web site often to follow the students, find out what they are bringing home in their garden bags, and check out the other pages on the web site. Encourage your student to work the bi-weekly problem posted on the web site. Answering these problems will count for extra credit in class. There are already 110 pictures posted on the web site. Teachers take the pictures each week and they are then posted by Mr. Langridge shortly after each week's classes. Can you find your picture?

The Growers use the preserves from the summer gardens as a primary source of funding for the gardens. Several items are now out of stock until next summer, but there are still lots of delicious jams, jellies, and other goodies available. If you want to give a unique gift this holiday season, consider buying a crate of jelly branded from OFE. Tie a red ribbon around the crate and it makes a perfect gift. We have updated the inventory of what is still available. [www.ofegrowers.org/produce-inventory.html](http://www.ofegrowers.org/produce-inventory.html). Send a note to [hoppergo@aol.com](mailto:hoppergo@aol.com) with your order. We will make arrangements to get the product to you. This is a unique gift for a grandparent, a neighbor, mailman, friend! Buy it now and you will not have to run out at the last minute in a panic. Speaking of grandparents, we plan to have the preserves at grandparent's day next week. Tell them to bring along a few dollars to buy you a jar of grape jelly or maybe they will want some for themselves.

Give us your feedback. We welcome your thoughts and contributions of any kind.  
[www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org)