

In spite of a rainy week, the students in Mrs. Fortner's classes were able to garden on Thursday. Students are so disappointed when rain keeps them from the gardens, so we try to garden even if it is wet and there is a chance of rain. Hopefully muddy feet and some of our good garden soil on their clothes is something that parents can accept. Students learned about compost in class. They learned that it is good for the environment, the plants, the produce that they grow in the garden, and for those that eat that produce. Compost is great mulch, a good soil amendment, and an even better fertilizer since it is all natural and derived from local plants. The next two weeks students will be studying soil and specifically healthy soil. Without healthy soil we cannot grow healthy food. Without healthy food those who eat it won't be healthy either. We are already on pages 11 & 12 of the gardening manual. While the manual stays at school, the upcoming lessons are always found on the students' web site: www.ofegrowers.org, then click on 5th grade program & garden lesson. Students are reminded that at the end of the year they are tested on the questions in their manual. Since it is an open book test, it is super easy to get an A, if they fill in the blanks as they review the lessons. Parents are encouraged to read the lessons on line and quiz their children on the answers to the questions.

Students harvested sweet potatoes again this week. They were able to dig all the potatoes in the annex garden behind the kindergarten wing. Students are entering harvest weights into their data base and an official number will be available later. All the green leaves and vines were mulched and put into the compost bins by the shed. We hope that greenery will boost the temperature of the compost to about 140 degrees. This is a measurement the students take each week. Ask them what it is that makes it that hot inside the compost heap. (hint: it is not the sun) The next few weeks the attention will be on the sweet potato plants in the orchard. There should be at least as many out there as in the annex garden. Students were reminded that when they take their sweet potatoes home, they should allow them to cure for a few weeks before cooking them. Do not put them in a refrigerator or leave them outside where the squirrels will surely run off with them.

Additional radishes were planted as well as some added broccoli plants. Lettuce, spinach, cabbage, kale, collards and sugar snap peas are all doing well. Cucumbers, tomatoes, and peppers are now almost done for the year as they do not like cold weather. The okra and beans are still viable but, too, will stop producing in the next month or so depending on temperature. The beds that gave up the sweet potatoes the past few weeks will be reseeded with radishes in the next two weeks. One of the wonderful things about gardening in Atascocita is that you can grow things all year long and seldom have a garden bed that is empty. We have found it important that any bed that is empty should be mulched with mulched leaves or pine needles to keep weeds from sprouting.

As OFE gardens are all organic, we rely on many free resources for our gardening efforts. **Please don't send your leaves and pine needles to the landfill on trash day! Do bring them to the school and drop them off by the sign on the east parking lot by the water tower.** We rely heavily on these for our gardens and trees. Please no brush or trash! We received over 2000 trash bags full last school year.

The OFE Growers is a group of parents, grandparents, and community members who volunteer to maintain the gardens and nature areas at the school. We are a 501-c-3 all volunteer non-profit organization. Emily Fortner, a 5th grade science and math teacher, is the president of the Growers organization. We would love to have additional volunteers and support from you. Give Mrs. Fortner a call at 281-641-2834 or e-mail her at: emily.fortner@humbleisd.net, if you have questions or can help in any way.

We rely heavily on your donations to the www.ofegrowers.org to fund the gardening program. We do not receive funding from the school district. The gardening program will not survive without your financial help! Our budget this year is \$9350. That is a chunk, but every little bit helps. If you do not want to keep the jars from purchased preserves, do bring them back to school. We can reuse them again next year and save about 75 cents per jar recycled. There is a box in the entry way for these jars. We also need clean plastic grocery bags. We use about 100 per week packing up produce for students to take home. Finally if you are looking for an organization to make a tax deductible contribution at the end of this year, please consider the OFE Growers. Contributions can be sent to: OFE Growers, PO Box 1525, Humble, TX 77325

The gardening program is off to a great start this school year. Thanks for all your help in giving these students an experience they do not get in any other Humble ISD schools. This is another reason why OFE is a special place! Do go to the student's gardening web site to see all that they are doing! www.ofegrowers.org. New pictures are posted there each week of the students in action.