

There was lots of excitement amongst the students in Mrs. Smart's classroom this past Thursday as it was their first day to garden outside. Before actually going out, they had a review of safety, which is always a big priority with everyone. The classroom lesson centered around understanding how to read seed packets, reading the planting chart, and the difference in seeds. Transplanting and thinning were also discussed. The volunteers were impressed with how much the students remembered from their orientation.

Once out in the gardens the students donned gloves and went to work on their assigned tasks with the volunteers. The table team bagged up garlic chives, rosemary, cucumbers, Long beans, okra, some various types of eggplant and peppers, both spicy and sweet. Again, since there is usually not enough of one kind of produce to be given to all the students, not everyone took home the same items. However, the table team did their best to be equitable in making up 70 bags of produce. We hope that parents always make an effort to use these harvests in their meal preparations. Students are so proud of the things that they pick and grow.

The compost team recorded temperatures, both air and compost, read the rain gauges, and cut up various plant material for the compost bin. Compost is being moved from bin 2 to bin 3 to finish it up. As soon as bin 2 is emptied, bin 1 will be moved to bin 2. And so goes the composting work to make the wonderful compost which is used in the gardens to grow our produce.

The other teams planted various cole crops from purchased transplants. This included cauliflower, collards, and broccoli. Seeds were also planted. One of our volunteers had prepared seed strips with carrot, turnip, and lettuce seeds. These were used to plant the seeds in perfectly spaced rows. To do this, seeds are glued onto strips of paper towels or newspaper and then spaced in the garden and covered with compost. Typically they germinate in just a few days. The paper dissolves and becomes part of the soil.

This week we will repeat in Mrs. Fortner's classes the same set of lessons and more seeds and plants will be put into the garden. This Thursday, Mrs. Keifer will be doing the in-class lesson. We hope that these students will enjoy their gardening experience as much as last week's classes! Don't forget the weekly lessons are now included on the web site for students to review before class. Go to the web site and then click 5th grade program/garden lesson. As Mrs. Sanders always says, "do fill out the blanks in the book since the final exam is a open book test." Since the book stays at school, a wise student will find the answers on the web site and then fill in the blanks in the manual on or before class.

The OFE Growers is a group of parents, grandparents, and community members who volunteer to maintain the gardens and nature programs at the school. We are a 501-c-3 all volunteer non-profit organization. Emily Fortner, one of the 5th grade science and math teachers, 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.

Donate to the program by obtaining a jar or more of our delicious preserves from the summer gardens. You can go to our web site: www.ofegrowers.org and click on contact/inventory to see what remains. Who would not appreciate a holiday gift of a crate of preserves from the OFE gardens? Order four half pints, donate \$20, and get the crate as our thank you for helping us liquidate the inventory. Only about 60 jars are left out of over 900 a month ago. Don't delay! Once the supply is gone, there will be no more until next summer. We extend a huge thank you to everyone who has donated for preserves. The gardening program could not survive without this financial help! 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.

You can also donate to the program by saving your clean plastic grocery bags and sending them to the school with a 5th grader. We use them to send home fruit and vegetables grown in the gardens. We also use a couple thousand trash 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. While you are there, don't forget to recycle your newspapers, magazines and cardboard in the paper retriever bin also along the east property line. Thanks!