

## Growers News for the Week of November 13, 2017

This past week the sweet potato harvest concluded with the final digging in the orchard along the bed next to the athletic field. It was Ms. Warnack's students' time to ooh and aah over the size of the buried treasures they found just under the surface. First however, all the green leaves and vines had to be pulled off the fence and off the bed and surrounding area. Some had even grown up into the fruit trees. The vines are being mulched into small pieces and will find their way into the school's compost heaps. The total sweet potato harvest this year was an astounding 745 pounds. There will be lots of sweet potatoes in Atascocita for Thanksgiving dinners this year.

Students learned all about seeds and how to read a seed packet during the last two weeks. There is enough information on the packet for anyone to be able to successfully plant the seeds inside the packet. Like most things, following the instructions and a bit of practice will allow anyone to become proficient in growing plants. Mrs. Sanders also touched on planting a plant from a container into the ground. Many of the things we plant this time of the year are grown from seeds but some of the crops like cabbage and broccoli have a better success rate if the seeds are planted in a controlled environment and then transplanted in the garden when they are a few inches tall. We buy some of these kinds of plants for transplanting since we don't have a greenhouse in which to grow them.

Other harvests last week included peppers, tomatoes, kale, basil, cilantro, parsley, sorrel, broccoli, radishes, okra, lettuce, and of course sweet potatoes. The season is almost over for the tomatoes, peppers, and okra. These are summer crops and the students are now concentrating on cool season crops. Depending on how cold it gets this winter, we may be able to harvest these cool season crops all winter. Any temperature below about 25 degrees, however, would shut down most plants requiring that they be replanted. This happened to us last school year on January 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> when the temperature went down to the low 20's each night. In a small garden, it is possible to cover plants for a slight freeze, but at OFE the size of the gardens makes that impossible.

The outdoor classroom on the south side of the kindergarten wing is almost complete. The plan for this week is to sand the benches before putting a sealer on them. Hopefully, too, the plaque will be installed on the wall designating it the "Jo and Ken Sanders Outdoor Classroom". Jo was our first gardener at Oak Forest and her husband Ken orchestrated the building of the little red shed, as well as work benches, herb beds, other benches for seating and the teacher podium in the outdoor classroom. A few teachers have already taken advantage of the area. All teachers are encouraged to take advantage of this nature friendly area.

In that same area the Growers and 5<sup>th</sup> graders maintain what we call the annex garden. All but one of the beds in that area has been rebuilt in the past year. While we have had raised beds for a number of years, we have been elevating the sides as we rebuild them to about 10 inches. This takes lots more soil but we find that crops are much healthier in these taller beds especially root crops like carrots and radishes that grow underground. One bed in the annex was just rebuilt in the past two weeks. It is eight feet long and about 42 inches across. Rebuilding, including the soil to fill it, has cost about \$150. Much of the money raised through your generous contributions for preserves is used to rebuild these beds. In the two gardens and the orchard we have over 60 beds, some of them much larger than this one. In any case, thank you for your contributions and helping to make this gardening program available at OFE. No other school in the Humble ISD has this extensive of a gardening program.

We would love to have your discarded pumpkins or jack o lanterns. Students collect and dry the seeds to be used for spring planting. Pumpkins also make wonderful feedstock for our compost pile. Walk around to the main garden on the south side of the school and leave them in or near the compost piles. Do remember to save your pine needles, mulched leaves, and weed free newly mown grass clippings for us. You can drop your bags and pumpkins on the east side of the school near the water tower where you see the 'Drop Here' sign. 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. Do talk to

her or send her an e-mail at: [deborah.krenek@humbleisd.net](mailto:deborah.krenek@humbleisd.net), if you have questions. You can also learn about the OFE Growers and see pictures of the students in action by going to their web site at: [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org). New pictures have been posted of the sweet potato harvest. Check it out!