

Rain, rain, rain, and now cold and even colder! Weather like this makes all of us feel grateful that we don't have to make a living at farming. We are thankful too, that there are those who do provide us with lots of choices at the grocery store and we are not completely dependent on our own abilities and our gardens to provide our food and our Thanksgiving lunch and dinners. Happy Thanksgiving!

This week, due to the Thanksgiving lunch, gardening will be condensed to two morning classes. With the forecast cold weather, there may be a decision not to garden. This is seldom a decision the students would make, but one that is made for them in their best interests by teachers and staff. In any case, the in classroom lesson this week and last, was taught by Mrs. Sanders. It was all about leafy greens including lettuce, spinach, and so many other healthy vegetables. A short segment on "thinning" was also included to emphasize that if plants or seeds are planted too closely, some of them need to be cut off or pulled for the rest to mature into healthy plants. Do remember the current and next lesson are always posted on the Growers web site: www.ofegrowers.org. Go to 5th grade program and then click on garden lesson. Students are encouraged to read the lesson on line and take a stab at answering the questions in their gardening manual prior to class.

The last batch of sweet potatoes did go home with students last week. It was a good year for that crop and we hope that everyone saved part of their portion for their Thanksgiving dinner. In addition, radishes, lettuce, herbs, beans, tomatoes, peppers, and okra were in some of the 5th grade shopping bags last week going home from the gardens. Each student also got a mandarin orange. Our citrus trees are doing well so far this year, but the early freeze may set them back. Only time will tell!

Last week sugar snap peas were planted along the orchard fence. Normally these will grow to cover the fence by mid spring. The sugar snap peas are a big hit with the students once they realize how good they are raw. Many times the peas never make it home in the grocery bag. Also planted last week were over a hundred lettuce plants. In the orchard the planting beds are all made of concrete blocks. The bed that held the sweet potatoes until a few weeks ago has about 55 blocks along the edge. Each block has two holes just the right size for a lettuce plant. Students learned the "assembly line" approach to planting in these blocks. Starting from each end of the bed, teams of three students first roughed up the soil, second mixed in fertilizer, third put in a couple seeds, and forth covered the seed with a quarter inch of soil. The fifth step of watering the seeds in was skipped since rain was forecast and did come the following day. By being efficient and with each student having a particular task, working as teams, they planted the one hundred and ten holes in less than twenty minutes. We can taste the leafy greens already! Great job students!

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.

The OFE gardens are all organic and 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.** With the wind and freeze we look for lots of bags the next few weeks. 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 and a big thanks to those who have already dropped some off this year.

We appreciate your donations to the www.ofegrowers.org to fund the gardening program. We do not receive funding from the school district. The gardening program cannot 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 re-use 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.**

We would also love to have your **pumpkins** after Halloween or Thanksgiving. In our compost heap they make great compost. Students dig out the seeds and plant them in the spring. Everyone then can take home a pumpkin plant if they wish. Please don't send yours to the landfill. Drop it on the east parking lot near the leaf and pine needle sign.

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. **Without your support we could not offer this hands on program to the students! Thanks!**