

The holiday break is over and it is back to the gardens for most of the Growers volunteers this week. Of course, the garden never sleeps and there are always things to be done there if we wish to have a harvest. Due to a very early freeze, two nights in the upper 20's in mid November, many of the frost sensitive plants were lost way too early. Such quirky weather can make a gardener thankful that there are grocery stores.

Students in Mrs. Smart's two classes will be gardening this week on Thursday. Students will learn about cotton and sugar cane in class. These two crops were very important in the area in the late 1800's and the early 1900's. Mrs. Krenek, who is now a volunteer, will be teaching that lesson. We will be harvesting our specimen cotton plants and our small stand of sugar cane. Students always face a dilemma during this time. They must decide if they want to plant or eat their small piece of sugar cane.

Thinning is the other major task the next two weeks. Radishes and lettuce were planted prior to the break and since they are tiny seeds, students sometimes have a hard time planting them far enough apart so the plants have a chance to grow properly. Thinning is the hard decision of which ones to pull out or cut off so the rest will mature properly. All is not lost, however when they are pulled out. If done carefully, those that are pulled can be eaten as micro greens. Grocery stores charge a high price for micro greens.

Seeds will also be planted where seeds did not germinate for some reason. The sugar snap peas planted in the orchard are growing nicely. There are some gaps, however which we hope to fill. Speaking of the orchard, much of the citrus is ripening. Already the raccoons or possums are testing a few of the fruit. While things are not quite ripe, we always have to make decisions on when to pick to get our share versus the critters. Also, if a deep freeze (below 25 degrees) is forecast, we might pick the citrus a bit early.

Another fun thing the students do in the next few weeks is their annual pumpkin smash. Millions of pumpkins are thrown out in the trash each year after Halloween and Thanksgiving. The students smash the donated pumpkins, collect the seeds for planting in the spring, and place the remainder in their compost heaps. At last count we have over 30 pumpkins and more are coming in this week.

A big thank you to all the parents who purchased the remainder of our summer preserves at the Thanksgiving lunch on November 15th. This is our largest fundraiser and provides over half of the funding for the gardening program. It is all gone and our closet is bare until next summer. 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.

The OFE gardens are all organic and we rely on many free resources for the students' 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 have a good start towards achieving the 2000 trash bags full we have used each of the past few years. Thanks for those of you who have been dropping them off. We try to move them to where they are needed as fast as we can. **We also need clean plastic grocery bags. We use about 100 per week packing up produce for students to take home.**

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.

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. We appreciate any donations to fund the gardening program. We do not receive funding from the school district. Our budget this year is \$9350. That is a chunk, but every donation helps.

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