

It has been a rainy fall but last week after over three inches of rain on Wednesday, the students in Mrs. Fortner's classes were able to dig the rest of the sweet potatoes. Over the years the garden beds have been amended with lots of compost. The natural soil around the school tends to be sandy, so by adding the compost to sandy soil good drainage allows for gardening even shortly after a heavy rain. The last forty feet of sweet potatoes were very productive and all fifth grade students have now taken them home twice. WE hope you all enjoy these at Thanksgiving time or before if you wish. We don't like to waste anything coming from the gardens and because of that we collected and mulched several hundred pounds of vines. At the end of the summer the vines usually take over much of our gardening space, so mulching them and putting them into the compost heaps is a great way to use them.

Students again learned about healthy soil in the classroom. Mrs. Opperman loves to tell students without healthy soil you cannot have healthy plants and without healthy plants, the food we eat will not be healthy for us and we won't be healthy. This week the lesson will be on leafy greens. Mrs. Sanders will be talking about lettuce, spinach, Swiss chard, arugula, and French sorrel. All these plants love this kind of weather we are having and can be planted now. Do remember the current and next lesson are always posted on the web site: www.ofegrowers.org. Go to 5th grade program and then click on garden lesson.

Other than sweet potatoes, the harvests are small right now until the cool season plants are ready to pick. Students are still getting some okra, long beans, a few tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers. Broccoli heads are already forming and the other cole crops are looking healthy. Some of the citrus is ripening and we may send a few oranges home this week. It won't be long before the garden is full of fall and winter produce.

Last week lots of radishes were planted. We fill some of the beds where sweet potatoes were with radishes since they do well this time of year and will be finished by mid January when it will be time to plant onions. If you are doing a vegetable garden at home, now is a great time to plant lettuce and radishes. In the school gardens we try to keep most of the beds producing all winter long.

We always plant a few cotton plants and some sugar cane in the gardens. These are planted to show students two very important Texas agricultural products. We sometimes send some of these home during the winter.

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.** 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 have been receiving a few already this year. We do need 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. Thank you for your support!