

Growers News for the Week of December 4th, 2017

After a beautiful fall, suddenly this week winter appears to have surfaced. We always try to take the students outdoors for their gardening half hour each week, but the forecast for this week makes it look dubious. When that happens we still cover the lesson in the gardening booklet. Mrs. Keifer will be doing that this week and next and the topic will be root crops, (radishes, carrots, turnips, kohlrabi, and such). On a rainy day, Mrs. Sanders is always prepared to present: "Yes, there is math in the garden."

The students will also learn about Arbor Day at Oak Forest, which will be celebrated in January or February. Fifth grade students have purchased and planted a big tree at the school for the past 14 years. These trees are dedicated to the school as their gift in their final year at OFE. Each student is asked to earn \$3 as their part of the planting cost. They are also asked to earn the money and not ask for it from their parents. The holiday break is a great time for them to earn this money. In the past students have raked leaves, babysat, washed dishes, washed cars, and many other ingenious ways to earn their three dollar contribution. We always ask them how they earned it. The best answers written in a short paper will win some sort of a prize. Also any class with 100% participation gets to attend a desert party supplied by the Growers.

We have secured almost 20 pumpkins for the students. These are used for a fun pumpkin smash. That is the fun part! Then, the students harvest the seeds and dry them for later use in planting spring pumpkins. Sometimes we roast some of the seeds as a treat. Finally, all the rest of the pumpkin is buried in the compost heap where it becomes wonderful compost for crops next spring. Several pumpkins are also hollowed out and planted in the garden with an herb or other plants. As the pumpkin decomposes, it supplies nutrients for the plant inside.

Last week the harvest included peppers, tomatoes, kale, basil, cilantro, parsley, sorrel, broccoli, radishes, lettuce, mustard greens, collards, beets, and some kumquats. The season is almost over for the tomatoes and peppers. The sugar snap peas planted earlier in the place of the cucumbers are already starting to produce. Baring a heavy freeze this winter there should be snap peas until early spring. Citrus is also maturing and most produce bags the next two weeks should have an orange or lemon inside. Lettuce and radishes, too, are abundant now and most students will be bringing some of them home.

Thank you for the many bags of leaves and pine needles you have brought to the school the past few weeks. We can always use more, so do remember to save your pine needles, mulched leaves, and weed free newly mown grass clippings for us. You can drop your bags and any pumpkins that you still have 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 Growers still have a number of preserves left. A four pack in a cedar carrying case is an ideal gift for holiday gift giving. There is still a supply of fig jam, gingered fig jam, tomato salsa, pickles and a bit of pickle relish and green pepper jelly left. Remember that these donations go toward funding the fifth grade garden and to the upkeep of the pollinator beds and school trees. Ask Mrs. Krenek or e-mail Mrs. Sanders at: josanders@verizon.net if you can help us liquidate these delicious preserves. When they are gone, they are gone until next summer! So, don't delay!

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, if you have questions. You can also learn about the OFE Growers and see pictures of the students in action in the gardens by going to their web site at: www.ofegrowers.org.