

It was a busy week in the gardens as the weather was perfect and all three classes were able to garden. One class was cut short by a fire drill but the students worked extra fast to finish their planting and harvesting. Lettuce, radishes, broccoli, kale, peppers, and herbs were harvested in the main garden. In the orchard, citrus is now abundant. Each student was able to take a lemon home from the Meyer lemon tree next to the garden shed. Some students also got tangerines, kumquats, and a few navel oranges. Most students got a mandarin orange. Most students also got a pummelo fruit. This did not come from the school gardens but was given to the students by a Kingwood friend of the Oppermans. It looks much like a grapefruit, but is sweeter and is the "parent" of modern grapefruit.

Several teams of students spent their garden day using a combination of molasses and super seaweed liquid fertilizer on most of the young growing plants. During the winter, organic granular fertilizers do not break down as fast, so by spraying the leaves and base of the plants with a liquid, many of the nutrients are absorbed by the plant. Students can see the fast growth of these plants any week that has sunshine and is fairly warm.

The recently upgraded and raised bed was planted with lots of kale. It is expected that this will mature in the next few months and then tomatoes will be planted there. We try to keep all the beds busy year-round. The beds that the sweet potatoes were dug from in October are already producing radishes that are going home in the student's produce bags. More will be harvested this week.

We appreciate the donated leaves and pine straw that have been dropped near the water tower at the back of the east parking lot. If you mulch your leaves and bag them, even if it includes green grass, we would love to have it versus it being sent to the landfill. We use these nutrient rich resources to mulch trees and garden plants and to make compost. Remember, students can't handle very heavy bags and we don't want them handling trash, so only clean materials, please. No brush or tree trimmings. We have collected many pumpkins that were being discarded. They are on display in the main garden and will be used for seeds and compost in January.

Any student wanting to earn extra credit, should spend some time on the Growers website working exercise #4. Correct answers, with the steps used to obtain the answer, will garner extra credit for the students as well as hone their math and reasoning skills. Go to www.ofegrowers.org, then click on Fifth Grade Program, then click on Exercises. Use the Student Comment Form and fill out the required fields. In the comment section have your student show their work with the answer. While on the web site you might want to also look at all the gardening pictures that have been taken this year. Mr. Langridge has also put some readings on the site that you might find fun and entertaining.

The next two weeks, students will be reminded about the tradition at Oak Forest that started in 2004. Former 5th grade teacher, Debbie Krenek, took up a collection from her class to buy a tree which they planted out in front of the school. Every year since, 5th graders have been collecting their pennies, dimes and quarters to plant another tree on campus. Each student is asked to earn \$3.00 as their contribution to this annual event. The long holiday vacation is an excellent time for students to rake leaves, babysit, or do other chores to earn their money. This year's tree will be planted in late January or early February.

Do take a walk around campus on a weekend or after school is out on December 20th. The campus and gardens are very attractive right now.