

During the past two weeks students have been harvesting oranges, kumquats, lemons, tangerines radishes, lettuce, turnips, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, collards, and lots of herbs. The garden is almost picture perfect right now. Walk past and take a look! Students also have completed their pumpkin smash for this year. We still have a few pumpkins left and they are being planted or will be put into the compost bin as they begin to decompose. Students saved lots of seeds from them. These will be planted in March and any student wanting to take a pumpkin plant home will have that opportunity.

In class the past two weeks students have learned about sugar cane and cotton, two very important crops in Texas. Each student was given a sugar cane node along with a short piece of cane. They were told they could eat the cane and plant the node if they wanted to grow their own. Sugar cane is a member of the grass family and can get ten feet high. It likes all day sun and lots of water.

Mrs. Krenek, the lead science teacher at OFE for many years, has retired but is now back as a volunteer in the gardens. She used her expertise to teach the class lesson the past two weeks. This week the students are learning about root crops such as radishes, turnips, and carrots.

The sugar snap peas planted about a month ago had a good germination rate. They are growing nicely along the fence outside the orchard and also in several spots in the main garden. Some of the early planted peas are already blooming. At this time of the year most empty beds are seeded with lettuce and radishes. There are hundreds of little plants growing all over the gardens. Look for lots of these in the take home vegetable bags in the months ahead.

As you may be aware, security gates have been installed around the school yard. You can no longer get to the playgrounds or garden without going through the school's front door. This only applies during times when students are present. In the evening, on weekends, and on student holidays the gates are unlocked. The gardens and orchard are still locked when no garden volunteer is present.

During November the District decided to remove the single stream recycling bin that was used to recycle items from the school. Unfortunately persons unknown were dumping trash into the bins during non school hours and it was costing the District money to have non school trash hauled away. The Paper Retriever bin is still on the west side of the teachers' parking lot. Let's use that as intended for only paper and flattened cardboard. Other recycling products can be taken to the Kingwood Metro lot each weekend from Friday noon until dark on Sunday. If you recycle, do recycle right. No trash or dirty product.

Thank you to all who have been bringing their leaves and pine needles to the school for composting and mulching. There is a sign in the east parking lot showing where to put your bags. Please no brush or weeds! Since many of these bags are moved by 5th graders, they may not be as strong as you. Please keep the weight of the bags manageable for them.

Speaking of leaves, each year for the past 14, the combined 5th grade class has purchased and planted a tree on campus as their going away present to the school. Most trees have been various varieties of Oak to reforest the Oak Forest Campus. This year students will plant their tree on February 28th. Each student has been asked to earn three dollars as their contribution to the tree and planting expenses. Parents, please make your student earn their money. Do not give it to them without some work. They may be asked to write an essay on how they earned their money. See our web page to find out more about Arbor Day at OFE.

<http://www.ofegrowers.org/arbor-day.html>. Pictures of the students in action are also on the web site.

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.

If you or your business are looking for an organization to make a tax deductible contribution to at the end of this year, please consider the OFE Growers. Contributions can be sent to: OFE Growers, PO Box 1525, Kingwood, 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!

Happy Holidays from the OFE Growers!