

The first week of gardening for this year's fifth graders is "in the books". It was, by all accounts, a successful day last Thursday as students in Mrs. Smart's and Ms. Curtis's homerooms completed their garden orientation. Coming up this week we will meet with Mrs. Harisis, Mrs. Tiffin, and Mrs. Fortner's home room students.

Students will be separated into small teams and then will spend about 15 minutes at three different "stations" where they will be instructed by volunteers on topics that will be important as they begin preparing garden beds, planting seeds and plants, and eventually harvesting their prized crops.

Safety with the gardening tools is the first station. In 16 years of gardening we have never had a serious injury. Safety is no accident, and each student is expected to act in a safe manner in the gardens. We really emphasize safety in a major way, since they will be using adult tools and equipment.

The second station, will acquaint the students with the Growers web site, www.ofegrowers.org. Beside working in the gardens, they are expected to work problems which they will be able to access on the web site. In class they will use the data found on the website to chart progress in the gardens with statistics such as amount of harvest, temperature, and rain amounts. During last week's orientation classes, the students were really excited to see the web site with some pictures from past years. They realized that their gardening manual is on line and they can share it with their parents.

At the third station students will learn how to use the various instruments that are used to measure temperature, rainfall, and harvest totals. Since this will be held around the Little Red Shed, they will also learn about the compost bins and the water collection systems used in the gardens to collect and save rain water.

One slight downside of gardening in August and September in Houston is that there are not many crops to harvest. That, too, is a lesson that students (and parents) must learn. It takes some work before they get a payoff. We will be planting radishes, lettuce, carrots and other vegetables in the weeks ahead but they must be tended and grow before there is a harvest or much can be taken home. One exception is the sweet potato crop which has happily grown all summer in several areas of the gardens. These were planted forward by last year's 5th graders. They will be harvested in October.

In other parts of the garden we still have okra, peppers, herbs, eggplant, and a few tomatoes growing. These are holdovers from the summer garden but will soon give way to the fall crops

Do go to the web site often to follow the students, find out what they are bringing home in their garden bags, and check out other pages on the web site. Give us your feedback. We welcome your thoughts and contributions of any kind.

Please help us liquidate the preserves from the summer gardens so we can concentrate on teaching the students and have the funds to carry this program on into the future. We have updated the inventory of what is still available. www.ofegrowers.org/produce-inventory.html. Send us a note through the website or to hoppergo@aol.com with your order. We will make arrangements to get the product to you.

We were excited to see the enthusiasm of the students last week and are looking forward to another successful year in the gardens and nature areas at OFE!