

## Growers News for Falcon Focus

September 20, 2018

Mrs. Smart's classes received one on one instruction as to how to accurately record data from the gardening session, how to cut with pruners, how to seed and transplant, how to read the weighing scales, thermometers, and rain gages, how to read the planting chart, and other pertinent things that they need to know before actually getting out into the garden beds. This week it will be Mrs. Fortner's students' turns. The students will then start their gardening hands-on experiences on September 27th. They have been impatient to get outside but have listened carefully. We think they are ready!

We peeked under the miles of sweet potato vines last week and dug out a beautifully formed tuber, so it won't be too long until they will be harvested. This is always a big, exciting harvest for the students. These plants were planted by last year's class of 5<sup>th</sup> graders and at the end of this school year current 5th graders will pay forward to next year's class by doing the same. Sweet potatoes love the hot summer and with the recent rain, they continue to grow.

Carrot, radish and lettuce seeds are up and growing. The late summer plantings of zucchini, cucumbers and yard-long beans are already blooming. We can see small cucumbers and beans forming already. Of course, the okra is still determinedly putting out fruits! (bet you thought it was a vegetable) It won't quit until it cools down a bit. The hot peppers also show no signs of slowing down. A few sweet peppers made it through the summer and are now beginning to produce nice green peppers. When we are able to save pepper, tomatoes, and eggplant over the summer we often get a bumper crop in the fall. Let's hope!

With the fall migrations soon upon us, we are seeing so many butterflies, particularly Monarchs, and also hummingbirds. It is wonderful to see the kaleidoscope of color these creatures bring to the campus. The purple martins that have lived on campus since late winter have raised two generations of young ones and have probably eaten thousands of mosquitoes in the neighborhood. They have left to gather in large groups to prepare for their long flight to South America. They are such social birds and even though they live right next to the playground, all the noise and commotion doesn't ever seem to bother them. See you again in March.

The OFE Growers is a diverse group of mostly retired people. We would love to have any parents, grandparents, or community members give us a hand in maintaining the gardening program at the school. The OFE Growers is a 501-c-3 all volunteer non-profit organization. Emily Fortner, one of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade science and math teachers, is the president of the Growers organization. If you would like to join a fun group of garden volunteers running this program, get in touch with Mrs. Fortner to get started. You need not be a vegetable gardener. Actually, you can keep your hands clean by helping keep up our database created last year to keep records to help in our gardening efforts. You could also be our web master. Volunteer, Denton Langridge, our interim web master, would love some help. Are you good at photography? We could use a photographer as well. We supply the camera. You would have to attend classes on Thursdays to catch students in action. Give Mrs. Fortner a call at 281-641-2834 or e-mail her at: [emily.fortner@humbleisd.net](mailto:emily.fortner@humbleisd.net), if you have questions or can help in any way.

Donate to the program by obtaining a jar or more of our delicious preserves from the summer gardens. You can go to our web site: [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org) and click on contact/inventory to see what remains. Who would not appreciate a holiday gift of a crate of preserves from the OFE gardens? Order four half pints, donate \$20, and get the crate as our thank you for helping us liquidate the inventory. Only about 100 jars left out of over 900 a month ago. Don't delay! A big thank you to all the grandparents who donated for preserves last Thursday!

You can also donate to the program by saving your clean plastic grocery bags and sending them to the school with a 5<sup>th</sup> grader. We use them to send home fruit and vegetables grown in the gardens. We also use a couple thousand trash bags of clean leaves and pine needles around campus for mulching and composting. Don't send them to the landfill; drop them off by the sign on the east parking lot. Thanks!