

Growers News for Falcon Focus

September 27, 2018

Orientation is over and now it is on to gardening. Mrs. Smart's classes will make their first trip to the OFE gardens this week on Thursday. They are excited! We believe they are ready to learn and to earn all the wonderful things a garden can give to them. They believe it will be fun, and it will, but they also will be learning science and math in an hands-on fashion.

We always start each class with a lesson out of the 5th grade OFE Gardening Manual. Each student has been given one by the OFE Growers. While this is a major expenditure, we feel it is something they may keep and use long after they leave Oak Forest. The lesson this week will be on planting seeds from a seed packet. There is lots of knowledge in one of those \$1.99 packets. Once seeds are planted, it is important to make sure the young plants are spaced properly. In the gardening world we call this a "thinning" exercise. If you plant the seeds too close together you get to pull some of them out and thin the field of excess plants.

The students will practice this skill in the garden by planting radishes, turnips, and lettuce from seed. Assuming favorable weather, they may see a harvest from these in as little as 60 days. It is also time to plant transplants of broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, and other cool season crops. It is not clear if we will have suitable plants on Thursday but we do have our "scouts" out looking for them

Beans and cucumbers planted by the volunteers only about six weeks ago are already producing. Okra is still producing as well as some of the peppers from last spring. So there should be a small harvest on Thursday. The students are tasked with dividing the harvests into portions so that each student gets to take something home. We hope their hard work finds its way into dinner that evening when they get it home. You will never get fresher produce unless you grow it in your back yard. Of course all OFE produce is organic. From time to time we will also send home simple recipes which utilize some of the produce students will be bringing home.

The OFE Growers is a group of parents, grandparents, and community members who volunteer to maintain the gardens and nature programs at the school. We are a 501-c-3 all volunteer non-profit organization. Emily Fortner, one of the 5th grade science and math teachers, is the president of the Growers organization. If you would like to join a dedicated group of garden volunteers, 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 need 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, 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 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 60 jars are left out of over 900 a month ago. Don't delay! We extend a huge thank you to everyone who has donated for preserves. The program could not survive without this financial help!

You can also donate to the program by saving your clean plastic grocery bags and sending them to the school with a 5th 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. And while there, don't forget to recycle your newspapers, magazines and cardboard in the paper retriever also along the east property line. Thanks!