

Arbor Day was a big hit this year as it is every year! The 5th grade class donated an oak, *Quercus canbyi*, to Oak Forest Elementary School on Thursday the 25th and then the whole class planted the tree in its new home bordering the track between the jungle gym play area and the swing sets. Planting proceedings included a number of teams all working together to successfully move the tree from the orchard area to the planting site, a presentation program to officially donate the tree to the school, positioning the tree in the spot intended, watering and returning the soil around the root ball, mulching the tree and cleanup. The entire process including the burial of the time capsule was for the most part completed just before the rains came. For the next several months it will be important for the class to keep track of this tree's progress as it establishes its root system in its new home soil. The most important thing to be on the lookout for is that the tree does not dry out. That means we will need to water the tree on a regular basis up to and even through the summer time. An irrigation line will be installed this spring to provide water for the tree through the summer. Please take a moment when you are out in the play area to observe the tree and let us know if you think something isn't right.

The gardens took a pretty big hit with the cold weather last week. Many of our plants suffered partial or complete defoliation. Carrot tops were killed off by the freeze but the carrots below are still good as they did not freeze due to the protection of the soil. If you look closely you will see that the carrots are sprouting new tops. Any veggies or fruit that was subjected to the freezing conditions (i.e. were above ground) did not do so well and have now been removed as they had become soft and squishy!

Many garden beds have now been cleared and made ready to receive the spring garden plantings such as tomatoes, lettuce, squash, cucumbers, and beans. Since there is still a chance of another freeze, as winter is not over yet even though it might feel like it, these plantings might have to wait until mid- to late march. It's a matter of crop strategy isn't it? For instance, some tomatoes have already been planted knowing full well that we may lose them if another frost happens. It's a risk that gardeners often take when weighing the pros and cons. Tomatoes for example don't set fruit during the hot days and nights above 90's. So early planting can mean increased and earlier yields before the dog days of summer are on us. If you look at your planting chart at the back of the book you can get an idea of when to plant and how long before you can expect ripened fruit (harvest time). One way we try to make a crop like tomatoes a desirable garden crop in semi-tropical climate is to shorten the 'garden time'. What is garden time you might ask? Garden time is the time the plant is actually in the garden for the purposes of growing its fruit or vegetable. So if a plant is grown inside under optimal conditions, we can start it earlier (Jan or Feb) so that when it's time to plant in the garden we already have a young but nearly mature plant to transplant into the garden. Thus we've shortened the garden time to mature fruit (or vegetables depending on our plant.) It still takes the 75 – 90 days to get to mature fruit but some of those early growing days were in Jan or Feb. In the case of the in-determinant tomato that means we will be able to harvest more tomatoes from our garden! In the case of the determinant tomato it might mean a bigger crop of tomatoes at harvest time. Looking at the planting chart, can you make a case for starting other transplants instead of directly planting seeds in the garden?