

OFE Growers Newsletter for April 7, 2022

This week we began the lesson on Insects and Integrated Pest Management (IPM). As I mentioned in the last newsletter, we don't use strong chemicals in our garden as it is important NOT to have our garden plants incorporate these chemicals. This lesson is the real challenge for the home and commercial gardener alike as it is hard to see the crops we planted being attacked by all sorts of pests (insects, birds, squirrels, plants, bacteria and fungi.) We have become so enamored by the quick and easy use of chemicals to kill (-cide) these unwanted pests that it is hard to see another way in which to cope with the threats to our crops. But the truth of the matter is that each organism is part of the overall balance of nature. As we learned pests have pests and as such can be thought of as part of a much larger food chain. Upsetting that balance through elimination of a species causes the food chain to have to adjust putting more pressure on the ecosystem. When the change is too great, the result is a cascade of adjustments sometimes resulting in the loss of a number of species. Do you recall that over 30 percent of our vegetables are made possible by pollinators such as bees, moths, and flies? If we spray to eliminate mosquitoes with a powerful insecticide (there's that suffix -cide again) we kill all sorts of pollinators as well. This practice can result in less available vegetables to eat. There is no easy fix (no one likes mosquitoes but certain birds and dragon flies do) so we all need to be thinking of alternative ways in which we can reach our goals with minimal negative effects on our ecosystems. Please keep that in mind as you reach for the spray can!

The gardens are looking super great at this time. The beds are filled with beautiful green vegetables and continue to provide a bountiful harvests of lettuce, swiss chard, carrots, sugar snap peas, turnips, and radishes! We've begun the transition to a summer garden with the planting of yard long beans, cucumbers tomatoes, eggplant, and peppers.

In the Orchard, we have growing peppers and cucumbers and tomatoes. The sugar snap peas are finally producing. It looks as though we will have some pears this year as we see a lot of blossoms on the pear trees.

As a final note, the Orchard's new citrus is showing an abundance of flowers on all the trees. While it looks fantastic, these small new trees will not be able to support all these buds and will probably drop a lot of them as time goes on. During the summer, we will also have to remove a lot of the remaining buds as their turning into fruit will overly stress the tree and be too heavy for the trees to support causing broken limbs and split trees.

As mentioned earlier, STAAR preparation and testing, will affect our lessons but we may still be able to meet outside to garden. Let's hope we can do this, stay tuned.