

This week we initiated the lesson on legumes. If this topic captured your interest there are more pages in your manual that talk about how gardeners take advantage of nitrogen fixation. Please take a moment to go to page 43 and read about “Three Sisters Garden”. This points to how Native Americans were in tune with the idea of one plant helping another in a number of ways. For instance, corn an aggressive nitrogen user depended upon the bean to help provide nitrogen for the corn’s growth while offering better access to the sun light by acting as a trellis. The squash a sprawling vine provided ground shade and thereby helped to retain moisture in the soil while blocking the sun thereby reducing competitive weed growth. This three-some seems meant for each other but I bet you could identify others that could work together. Try, see if you can come up with two or more plants working together to make survival a better reality. This will take some investigating!

What’s it called when two or more organisms rely on each other for their survival?

One final thought, do you see the connection between living organisms in the ground and their dependence with the living organisms above ground? What is the advantage to the microorganism? If the plant gets help from the microbe, what does the microbe get?

The chemical connectivity between plants (sometimes referred to as the underground internet) is orchestrated by the organisms in the ground, i.e. the bacteria and fungi. Plant nutrient availability is dependent to a very very large extent on microorganisms!

The gardens are looking great and we are well into summer garden planting. Our ordered sweet potato slips have arrived and so the white potatoes must make way for the next crop. It’s a lesson that is well worth learning that timing is everything. While we are upset about the protracted time it’s taken for the potatoes to start growing, as it conflicts with our next crop and the end of the school year, the truth is with the hot days of the summer the white potato won’t grow as well and at best we might get small potatoes as a harvestable crop. If we were commercial growers that would mean we might not be able to pay for all the work done to grow these potatoes. In other words as a business it’s a loss, if these potatoes were for us for the winter, we would be hungry or without food. That could be catastrophic as a community! Back to the sweet potatoes, we started to plant our sweet potatoes in Orchard bed #2. We planted three varieties, Covingtons, Beauregards, and Georgia Jets. In total we planted 95 slips, a few of course won’t make it but most will and next year’s 5<sup>th</sup> grade class will get to harvest this sweet potato crop! Thanks for helping to plant this crop for next year’s class.

The Orchard’s new citrus has shown an abundance of flowers and now beginning fruit on all the trees. During the summer, we will also have to remove a lot of that starting fruit as their maturation will overly stress the trees.

We have only a few weeks left of this school year at this point so I wanted to say that it has been fun working with this 5<sup>th</sup> grade class as your help and enthusiasm has been great and very enjoyable. Just look at how nature’s actors, plants, insects, microbes, and fungi have responded to your work with such a splendid display of vegetables and flowers! FANTASTIC!