

Last week there was no student gardening, but the gardens had a lot of fresh vegetables ready for harvesting. So the volunteers harvested kale, radishes, collards, and lettuce for the 5th grade class for this week. The gardens look quite grand with an abundance of green and an explosion of tomato plants. The warm days and cool nights are the tomatoes optimal growth conditions and as a result, if you look closely, you will see tomatoes of all sizes hiding under the leaves as well as an abundance of flowers which portends more fruit to come. Am I right it is a fruit? or a vegetable? Oh well, I think you probably know by now (but if not you should)!

This is that special time of the year when the temperatures favor both the early summer veggies and the winter veggies. So the leafy vegetables (such as lettuce collards spinach), tomatoes, potatoes, and onions are all thriving! A little later on the high temperatures and dehydration brought on by the strong sun will make it increasingly difficult for the winter crops to survive and we will become focused on the summer garden crops like sweet potatoes, beans, and okra. So that brings me to the next point, if you look carefully at the onions in the orchard or better the annex you can see that the bulb-like area of the onion is beginning to be obvious as it pushes up out of the ground. That means it won't be long before we need to harvest our onions, at longest a month but probably earlier. Do you remember how we tell when to harvest onions? At about the same time our potatoes will also be about ready for digging! And then, we need to plant our summer crop --- the sweet potato!

Next week we will meet with our 5th grade students to finish the insects and IPM lesson and to do outdoor gardening. The lesson set after that will be on butterfly gardening. A complete garden incorporates support for the many necessary and different types of pollinators. Recall that 1/3 of our garden crops are dependent upon bee pollination - just one type of pollinator. If you were to name 9 veggies and their pollinators, I bet most of what will be named will have had a bee as a key part of the veggies' reproductive life cycle. Then from your list remove all of the veggies that depend on the bees for pollination and see what is left. This little exercise demonstrates that without the bee pollinator we would not have those veggies on our tables. Our diets would be very different! Would you be happy with what is left? So, it is important that not only do the bees need to be supported but the same can be said to be true for the many other types of pollinators. Can you name some? I know we've talked about them from time to time, take a moment and see if you can name 5 or six. Do the butterfly beds support only butterflies?

Looking forward to this week's get together,