

September 3rd will be our first day with the new class of 5th grade students. We are expecting to have a number of sessions throughout the September 3rd school day to meet with all the 5th grade classes to go over garden orientation and garden / tool safety. The students will have been divided into teams (for the year) prior to going outside and will wear name badges as will the volunteers so that we can all get to know one another. The students will join their outdoor team volunteers (identified by team #'s) who will be spread out for social distancing . Volunteers and students will be asked to wear face masks and have their own gloves. After the individual teams have gathered, the volunteers will explain what the team is going to be doing that day. Each team will visit a number of stations as part of an orientation that is set up to explain the gardens, garden tasks, and garden tools. Orientation safety will be stressed, centered around the tasks the individual teams are going to be doing. So safety lessons will vary based on the tasks being discussed. By the end of the year each team will have had a chance to have learned about all the different tasks that gardeners do and the safety requirements that are expected to be followed. Poor safety practices means a student might be asked to sit out a lesson or leave the gardens. We live by the saying that "safety is no accident". This first introduction to safety is important as we get the students acquainted with all the tools they will be using over the course of the year and how to handle them. Know that safety will be addressed before each team works in the garden and is based on the tasks to be done and the tools to be used. On September 3rd, we will also be getting acquainted with the gardens by visiting the main garden or the annex garden talking about the layout of the gardens and what we are going to be doing over the course of the school year.

The garden is still a summer garden but about to become a fall garden because of the Texas climate. We have an opportunity to have two gardens over the course of a year – a summer garden and a fall garden. Different vegetables are grown in the summer versus the fall gardens. When the students first visit the gardens they will see yard long beans, sweet potatoes, and 9 feet high Okra still growing vigorously in the summer garden, but many beds will look unused as they are being prepared to grow our fall crops. This is the transition from the summer garden to the fall garden. The students will get to plant cole crops (e.g. broccoli, rutabaga, turnips, and radishes), while they will still be able to harvest okra, yard long beans, and eggplant. They will get to prepare beds for planting, plant fall crops, make compost, thin and mulch their young new plants, and harvest-harvest-harvest.

There is still a lot of newly canned produce from this year's summer gardens that is available to those that are interested. Please visit the OFE Growers website (OFEGrowers.org) to see what's available and to make an order if you find something you just have to have.

Visiting this website is a chance to see what the garden program is all about. You can learn about the history of the program, about the garden program lessons, and follow real time by occasionally viewing a growing gallery of pictures of the students as they participate in the gardens' care all year long or reading the garden manual.

We're excited to be getting going again and look forward to a really fun year!

And please Stay safe,