

OFE Growers Newsletter for September 23rd, 2021

This week we've begun our lesson on composting. While there are many ways to approach composting, we put a good deal of emphasis on process efficiency. What that means is we tend to the process of composting just like it was a crop or plant growing in the garden. Raw materials such as green and brown matter are layered in compost bin #1 taking care to approximate 1 part green matter, considered the nitrogen source with 2 parts brown matter, the carbon source. The microbial engine for converting the waste organic matter is regularly amended to keep the process moving along. We take care to see that the compost bins are kept at an appropriate moisture level with harvested rain water. The rain water really supports the microbial activity as there are no antimicrobial agents in the water to reduce the microbial viability. The composting material is mixed regularly to incorporate air (oxygen) to support rapid microbial activity. This involves actually moving the composting material from one bin to the next which mixes the compost and eliminates anaerobic pockets. Since the system is aerobic, the composting process does not produce a strong odor in fact is odorless. By the end of the school year we will have made over a ton of compost which is almost completely consumed by our garden plants.

This last week we began to start to plant our gardens for our fall crops. In order to have produce to send home with you we sometimes take advantage of having started our vegetable plants at the end of summer in a more controlled environment. Taking advantage of starting our plants a little earlier means that we can transplant these vegetables into the garden when the conditions are better for them to grow and when other crops such as sweet potatoes have been harvested making room for the fall plants. If you were to look at the last page in your books, you would see that the planting chart not only tells you when is the best time to plant in the garden but it also tells you approximately how long for germination (seeds to sprout) to occur and time until produce is about ready to pick. This chart is modified to fit the Houston weather and climate conditions for good growth conditions for the vegetable in question. This transplanting approach is really useful at the end of the year as bad weather can mean very little harvest, but giving ourselves a little bit more growing time can result in more harvest. Some crops we do this with are tomatoes, turnips, peppers, cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower just to name a few.

This week will be the conclusion of the composting lesson and we will then be moving on to planting : seeds and transplants.

Don't hesitate to look at the website and find the pictures of yourselves working in the gardens. There are two sets of pictures, one is the weekly pictures of each Thursday class and the second set is all the pictures taken to date of this year's class (<https://www.ofegrowers.org/5th-grade-program.html> ).

Finally, we are in the need of clean green mulch and pine needles. These can be dropped off tree by the orchard shed (East side parking lot).

See you on Thursday,