

The 5th Grade Gardening Program

The main objectives of the 5th grade Gardening Program are:

1. Implement science and math TEKs lessons in a 'hands-on' setting.
2. Encourage practical problem solving skills.
3. Foster a love for the out-of-doors.
4. Foster good stewardship of our environment.
5. Encourage teamwork in completing tasks.
6. Encourage good nutrition.
7. Strive for safety. As students use adult tools in their gardening activity, safety education is first and foremost in every meeting with the students.
8. Improve communication skills through reporting garden activities.
9. Encourage a recycling ethic by 'hands-on' composting. From waste to garden!
10. Teach gardening skills that can be carried forward into the future life of each student.



The OFE Growers

Funding for and contributions to these science and gardening programs are administered by a non-profit corporation, OFE Growers, Inc. Donations to this non-profit organization are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. **Your support, financially and physically, is needed to continue the program.** Contributions can be made to OFE Growers, PO Box 5125, Kingwood, TX 77325. Checks should be made payable to "OFE Growers". This program is solely funded by these donations, your donations for preserves from the summer gardens, and VIP grants through the ExxonMobil Foundation.

Students grow everything organically and recycle over 2500 trash bags of green waste each year into compost or mulch. They produce nearly 3000 pounds of produce each year. Almost all produce goes home with students. The OFE Growers also maintain and plant many other areas of the campus.

OFE Growers welcomes parent volunteers to help with the 5th Grade Gardening on Thursdays, or for periodic work days. Please consider volunteering with this group. No experience is necessary. The Growers will train you if interested. If you have **questions or wish to volunteer** contact: **Mrs. Smart** at: brooke.smart@humbleisd.net. **Please step up! We need your help!**

OFE 5th Grade Gardening Parents' Guide



This program is brought to your 5th grade student by:

The OFE Growers

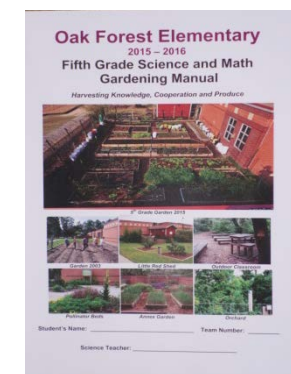
A non-profit, all volunteer, 501.c.3 organization solely dedicated to Gardening and Nature at OFE as part of the Math and Science Curriculum
Check out the Growers website: www.OFEGrowers.org

Student Gardening Manuals

Each 5th Grade student will be given a gardening manual which will be theirs to take home at the end of the school year. The manual is a basic guide to gardening in the Lake Houston Area. The manual is written and printed by the OFE Growers at no cost to your student. The guide offers valuable advice as well as lessons in science and math.

Please consider using this guide at home to start a garden for your family. **If you wish to follow your student's progress in this manual you can go to the Growers web site where you will find the whole manual.**

Many former students and their families have started a home garden using this manual. This can be a rewarding and beneficial activity for the entire family. Harvesting organic produce and cooking that produce is so healthy! Each manual also contains recipes of favorite foods from the student harvest festival held every May for all 5th Graders.



The benefits of gardening are numerous!

Parent Guide to 5th Grade Gardening

This fall, your student will begin a unique gardening program available only at Oak Forest Elementary School! This program is part of the student's math and science curriculum. It will be part of his/her grade in these subjects. Your encouragement and support will be a necessary tool in his/her success. Please be aware of what is expected of your student in this class.

Your student will meet with the OFE Grower volunteers every other Thursday during their regular math/science class. Please make sure that your student is properly dressed for this class.

- We expect students to wear **close-toed shoes** – absolutely no sandals or flip-flops!
- Students will get dirty, so **old clothes** that can be laundered easily are preferable.
- Make certain that he/she has **clothes appropriate for the weather** and conditions!
- They will get hot, wet, or cold depending on the day's weather.

Each student will bring home produce depending on the day's harvest. On some days this is very little, but other times much more. Over the course of the year expect some 20 pounds. Some of the produce may be unfamiliar to you. Learn how to eat these wonderful organic vegetables and fruits. If you do not use it, have your student give it to another who will.

How is 5th Grade Produce Grown?

Our gardens and orchard are totally organic. What does that mean to you and your student? It means that only organic methods are used to grow all produce. We use no synthetic harmful chemicals or fertilizers. This is to ensure your student's safety and the health of our soils and produce. Students handle organic fertilizers, but these are all deemed to be safe.

Organically grown food is known to be highly nutritious. Soils treated in an organic manner allow plants to take up valuable nutrients. Better for you and your family! Since this produce comes to you soon after being harvested, fewer nutrients are lost during storage. So, you can see that you are getting a quality product. We do not use chemicals to control disease and insects, but rely on other methods, so produce may not look as pristine as that obtained in a grocery store. That is usually a good thing! Discard any bad parts and eat the rest.

Students learn to make compost used in the gardens to fertilize and condition our soils. They learn to reduce waste in this manner, as all our green and brown plant wastes are made into valuable compost. We mulch our soils with leaves and grass clippings to keep down weed growth and keep our soils from drying out, thus reducing water needs. Bring your leaves and pine needles to school if you do not use them at home. We use over 2500 bags each year. We also "harvest" rain water for use in the gardens.

Produce Care Guide

Generally, the sooner you use it the better

Produce from the student gardens will be sent home in recycled plastic grocery bags. You may recycle your plastic bags (only clean ones, please) by sending them with your student on their gardening day. These bags can also be recycled at your grocery store.

Newspaper sleeves are used as well, especially for sending herbs home.

Please remind your student to give their bag of produce to you as soon as they arrive at home. This assures that the produce stays as fresh as possible. To keep produce fresh do the following:

1. Herbs should be wrapped in damp paper towels and placed in a vegetable bin of the refrigerator. Some can be placed in water with fresh cuts to the stems to be used within several days. See Herbs at the bottom of the next column.
2. Most produce can be washed and dried with paper towels and stored in your refrigerator vegetable bin. Exceptions include: tomatoes (keep on kitchen counter until red), potatoes and sweet potatoes (brush off dirt and store in a cool, dark place for later use), onions and garlic (allow them to air dry and store in cool dark place), fruit, (keep on the kitchen counter until ripe). Grapes and figs should be used as soon as possible. Citrus may be refrigerated or juiced. The juice can be frozen for later use.
3. Some produce, such as leafy greens and tomatoes, are easy to bruise. Handle gently!
4. If for some reason you don't use it, send it back for our compost heap.

Ideas for Using Produce

Experiment and have fun cooking together
(Go to www.ofegrowers.org for more info)

Most produce is best used fresh. The less it is processed, the more nutritious it is. We will have recipe suggestions on the website. Try cooking them with your student. You will also find photos of the produce harvested on the website.

- **Leafy greens** that your student brings home are good used in a salad. Encourage eating greens raw for a nutritional boost.
- **Cole crops** (cabbage family plants) are good when cooked minimally. Collard greens, beet greens, mustard greens, Swiss chard and spinach are best when sautéed gently until tender with some fats such as olive oil or butter.
- **Beans and peas and Summer Squash** should be steamed or sautéed lightly for best taste.
- **Eggplant and okra** can be used in many dishes. Eggplant lends itself to many cuisines. Use slices of it instead of pasta in lasagna.
- **Cucumbers, radishes, carrots, kohlrabi, peppers and tomatoes** are good in salads. They make healthy snacks for the whole family.
- **Potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips, and beets** are good roasted. Potatoes tossed with chopped rosemary, salt and olive oil, and then roasted are delicious and simple to prepare.
- **Herbs** - Suggested uses and photos are found on the website.