

OFE Growers Newsletter for August 26, 2021

At this time activity in the gardens is centered around preparation for our fall/winter garden planting as we switch from a summer garden to a fall/winter garden. That means many of the plants that have done so well for us during the summer such as the squash, okra, cucumbers, and beans are either dying off or have come to the end of their productive lives and therefore need to be removed so that room can be made for our fall planting. In addition, the soil in the vegetable beds needs to be amended with compost, and organic fertilizers in preparation for the next crop. We sometimes refer to this as letting the garden bed rest but really it is a period of renewal for all those organisms that live below the surface of the soil. This renewal is best achieved with the implementation of crop rotation. That is the changing of a crop in an area year to year. The same crops planted in the same beds depletes some of the nutrients that were necessary for that crop to thrive. By following with a crop that doesn't need those same nutrients we give the soil a chance to replenish the nutrients that were consumed by the previous crop. One such example of crop rotation commonly referred to is the planting of a legume (e.g. beans) in an area that you are going to follow with a crop that needs a lot of nitrogen such as corn. Legumes enjoy a supportive relationship (called symbiosis) with nitrogen fixing bacteria that supplies nitrogen to the legume and nutrients to the bacteria. This beneficial relationship also increases the level of nitrogen in the soil. There is also another really good reason not to plant the same crops year after year in the same bed and that is pest control. Pests have their favorite foods too. So by switching crops around we don't let the pests become too numerous for a particular area or crop. So good gardening also involves keeping records of what was planted and when in preparation for planning the next garden crop.

We have three gardening areas that we will be working this year. They are the main garden, the annex, and the orchard which is a vegetable garden and orchard area as well. In the main garden at this time we are preparing some of the beds for our fall plantings by adding compost and organic fertilizers to support nutrient balance and microbial growth in the soil. In the annex and orchard sweet potatoes were planted by last year's 5th graders for this year's 5th graders to harvest, so those beds are active at this time. There is always a lot going on in the gardens that's not planting or harvesting. Watering is sometimes necessary if weather conditions have become too rigorous as the life in the soil also needs water besides oxygen and nutrients. Besides maintenance, pruning, mulching, mowing and weeding are necessary activities. We find ourselves doing a lot of impromptu weeding. You know what that is? It is when you see an unwanted plant and you remove it that very instant! We do this because the unwanted plant is seen as competing for nutrients and water for the desired plants around it. Weeds are a source of seeds for yet more weeds. By the way, what is a weed?

Looking forward to our first meeting in September,