

OFE Growers Newsletter for May 11, 2023

This week's lesson was on insects and pest management. As you know we do not use commercially synthesized pesticides. Why is that? In general most of these commercially synthesized pesticides are general purpose, that is they are not selective for what they kill. As we have been learning eliminating all insects / pests is detrimental (causing harm) to our survival, take for instance pollinators like the bee. Do you recall our saying approximately 33% of our food is the result of pollinators like the bee. So if we kill all those insects that are annoying we are upsetting the balance of nature and eliminating 1/3 of our food source. Nature's approach to pest control is to favor a pest that is a predator to a pest. In class we talked about insects, their metamorphosis, and whether all insects are bad... We practice Integrated-Pest Management. Do you remember what that means. Integrated Pest Management is an organic approach that integrates both chemical and non-chemical practices for control of pests. Examples of this approach can take the form of an extracted chemical such as neem oil (cold pressed oil from the seeds of the Neem tree) used to control insect eggs and larvae, or a bacterium (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*) that is used against caterpillars and insect larvae e.g. mosquito larvae, and of course there is the pest or natural predator that feeds off the pest you wish to control. It is possible to cause a pest problem by killing off a predator that is already controlling a pest (an example might be the killing off ladybugs (lady beetles) with a non-selective pesticide when trying to get rid of aphids.) One last point, that which is labeled a pesticide is sometime also harmful to humans – not to be too puny... this can be a deadly business

The gardens are loving this cool weather and are flourishing at the moment. We finished harvesting our onions, and have started harvesting our white potatoes to be more accurate the potatoes we planted were red potatoes. It is unfortunate but this year the students will not get to plant sweet potatoes before the end of this school year.

The tomatoes, leafy greens, peppers, cucumbers, squash, and multiplying onions are all thriving and make the gardens look fantastic. This week we harvested onions and bush beans, broccoli, and potatoes putting the harvest in bags for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students so that everyone will get to take home onions and bounty of the gardens.

I want to say that we have really enjoyed working with you all throughout this year. You have been industrious and enthusiastic contributors and have made the gardening experience a lot of fun for us all. I hope as the years roll by you will look back on this time as a fun and valuable learning experience. You got to try new vegetables, use garden tools, experiment with compost tea, evaluate the garden's soil characteristics (sand, silt, and clay), and learn about gardening. You had a chance to develop your understanding of gardening including bed preparation, planting, fertilizing, and harvesting. And through it all you developed a scientific appreciation of gardening. And although you may not have appreciated it you did some scientific experimentation in the gardens and used your mathematical skills throughout the year. You did a LOT!!!!!!

Finally, I want to thank you all and wish you all a very happy and fun-filled summer.

Be Safe,