

This Thursday we completed our presentation of planting seeds and transplants. When we are faced with planting a seed sometimes the information about planting depth and spacing is not readily available. We can intuit from the appearance of a particular seed that it may not be able to survive a deep planting – small seed may not have enough nutrition in the seed to survive a long sprouting time. So lettuce seed for instance may need a short sprouting time before it reaches sunlight. So planting lettuce is expected to be less than 1/4” in the soil so that the sun’s energy can quickly aid in the seed’s/plant’s survival. Carrot seed are very small too so these need shallow planting. This is achieved by dropping the seed on top of the surface of the soil and covered with an ever so slight amount of soil or compost. We also learned that seed planting times, germination times, and yes the best times to plant can be found on seed packets or internet sources and, wait for it, even the back page of your gardening manual pg 59. It is worth noting that the best time to plant is very much dependent on where you live. Note the manual’s planting chart is adjusted for the West Lake Houston area’s growing season! How do seed packets tell you about best time to plant? We also explored the value of planting transplant (young pre-planted plants). The idea that the ‘time in the garden until harvest time’ can be shortened by starting our plants earlier and planting them in the garden later was one reason for transplanting. There are so many reasons to take advantage of planting transplants. Can you name 5 or more reasons for taking advantage of using transplants? Can all crops benefit from transplanting? What about carrots? and Lettuce?

Today several teams helped harvest sweet potatoes from the Annex planted by last year’s 5th grade class just before the end of their school year. Today’s harvest was 151 pounds of sweet potatoes bringing our final total of sweet potatoes for this year to 701 pounds 13 ounces. We didn’t beat last year’s harvest but, weather considered, this year’s yield was respectable. Aside from the actual harvest of the sweet potatoes we also harvested a large amount of green plant material that is very useful. Where do you think that green plant material was put to use? That’s right in our compost! So we harvested sweet potatoes for our thanksgiving tables additionally we harvested a large amount of nutrients from the vines for the micro- and macro-decomposers which will ultimately become the nutrients for our plants or where ever we use that compost, what a win win!

Each year the 5th grade class gets an opportunity to plant sweet potatoes for the next year’s 5th graders. A really nice pay it forward tradition.

I hope you have had time to take notice of your gardens, for instance the turnips are looking really good nearly ready to start harvesting, the collards have huge leaves and we have started to harvest the outer leaves, the broccoli (our compost tea experiment) looks fantastic. The carrots are filling in the bed now, radishes are also ready to harvest, the kale is pretty impressive and if you’ve been in the Orchard you can’t miss the rapidly growing cabbage and spinach. The cabbage is spectacular!!

Next time we will be learning about Cole crops. That’s not a typo, I didn’t mean ‘cold’ crops. Cole crops can be found in your manuals on page 18. You can access your manual on the website under 5th grade program. (https://www.ofegrowers.org/uploads/8/7/5/2/87524472/ofe_5th_grade_science_and_math_gardening_manual_2022_-_2023.pdf). You can find the answer to what is meant by Cole Crops there. We’re going to ask.

Be safe this Halloween, and we look forward to gardening together in a couple of weeks.