

## The 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Gardening Program

The main objectives of the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 this science and gardening program are administered by an all-volunteer non-profit 501-c-3 corporation, OFE Growers, Inc. Donations to this organization are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Your support, **financially** and **physically**, is needed to continue this program. Contributions can be made to The OFE Growers, PO Box 5125, Kingwood, TX 77325. Checks should be made payable to "OFE Growers". This program is also funded by VIP grants through the ExxonMobil Foundation and donations for preserves from the summer gardens.

**Please consider volunteering!!** OFE Growers welcome any parent, grandparent, or community volunteer to help with the 5<sup>th</sup> grade gardening on Thursdays, or Tuesday morning and Saturday morning workdays. No experience is necessary. The Growers will train you. A volunteer training session will be offered before the start of each school year. Contact us at: [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org), or your child's teacher. This program is totally dependent upon volunteers. Come help, learn, and foster a love of gardening and the out of doors.

Students grow all fruits and vegetables organically and recycle green waste each year into compost or mulch. They grow over 2500 pounds of produce each school year. Almost all produce goes home with students.

## Support Oak Forest 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Gardening [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org)



This program is brought to  
5<sup>th</sup> grade students at:  
**Oak Forest Elementary**  
by  
**The OFE Growers**

P.O. Box 5125 Kingwood, TX 77325

**A non-profit, all  
volunteer, 501.c.3 organization  
solely dedicated to gardening  
at OFE as part of the Math and  
Science Curriculum**

Please keep for future reference

## Fun in the Gardens



## Parent Guide to 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Gardening

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!

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 over 20 pounds. Some of the produce may be unfamiliar to you. Learn how to eat these wonderful organic vegetables and fruits. Refer to our website, [www.ofegrowers.org](http://www.ofegrowers.org) to identify produce and learn how to use it.

## How is 5<sup>th</sup> 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 and fertilizers in our gardens. This is to ensure your student's safety and the health of our soils and produce. Students will handle organic fertilizers on occasion, but these are all deemed safe.

Organically grown food is known to be highly nutritious. Soils treated in an organic manner allow plants to take up valuable nutrients which are passed on to the consumer. 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. As we do not use chemicals to control disease and insects, but rely on other methods, produce may not look as pristine as that purchased in a grocery store. That is usually a good thing! Discard bad parts and eat the rest.

Students learn to make compost that is used in the gardens to fertilize and condition our soils. They also learn to reduce waste in this manner, as all our green and brown plant wastes are made into valuable compost. We also 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 1000 bags each year.**

## Produce Care Guide (From the parents' gardening guide)

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

**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.
- 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 ripe), 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). Root crops such as carrots, beets and turnips should be washed, dried, and stored in the refrigerator until used. 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!

## Student Gardening Manuals

Each 5<sup>th</sup> Grade student is 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 the students. This 50+ page guide offers valuable information, as well as lessons in science and math.

Our hope is that this guide will be used at home to start a garden for the family. Parents or others that wish to have a copy may obtain one by sending a request to our PO Box along with \$10.00 donation to cover the cost of printing, postage, and handling.

Many of our former students and their families have started a home garden. This can be a rewarding and beneficial activity for the entire family. Harvesting organic produce and cooking that produce soon after picking it is so nutritious for everyone. Each manual also contains recipes of favorite foods from the student harvest festival held every May for all 5<sup>th</sup> Graders.

Consider ordering an extra copy for your home use. Use it as a family. The benefits of gardening are numerous.

If you would like further gardening help, go to: [www.Urbanharvest.org](http://www.Urbanharvest.org). They have classes and experienced staff to guide you.