

World Soil Day: Soil unsealing

In 2013, December 5 was declared World Soil Day by the United Nations General Assembly.

The soil is alive! Around 5 billion soil organisms live in a handful of healthy soil. Preserving this diversity means securing the basis of human life on this planet.

In 2020, the *Fédération Internationale des Jardins Familiaux* published the brochure "[Soil is alive! Protecting soil in allotment garden](#)". This should be read by the allotment garden family in order to protect the patch of soil entrusted to them.

Over the last four years, another aspect of soil protection has become increasingly important. Increasing weather extremes show how important it is not only to look after the quality of the existing soil, but also to ensure that sufficient unsealed soil is available.

Soil unsealing in the allotment garden

A sealed soil cannot fulfill its tasks. Water, oxygen and light cannot be stored in the soil and fertility is lost. Pollutants are no longer filtered by the plants and there is no cooling effect.

Allotment gardens are of great importance for the urban climate and water storage as, in addition to the cooling green spaces, they promote a high level of biodiversity in otherwise built-up areas. But even on this small scale, a minimum of sealed surfaces is essential. We would therefore like to call for a conscious approach to sealed areas in your garden. As small as these may seem in proportion, it is important to implement unsealing measures wherever possible.



Alternatives to sealed surfaces

Ideally, as many infiltration-capable areas as possible should be used right from the initial garden planning stage. However, it is never too late to make subsequent optimizations.

The most common alternatives to sealed surfaces in the garden include:

- Gravel lawn or overgrown grass pavers
- a hard-wearing herbal lawn
- Wooden decking with drainage layer
- Laying recycled materials such as old bricks
- Paving stones for small paths in the garden ...

The aim is to *use water-permeable paving* wherever possible. If you identify rarely used sealed areas in your garden, you should convert them into green spaces. This not only creates living space but also has a cooling effect. However, in addition to this complete unsealing, partial unsealing can also make an important contribution.



Partial unsealing involves removing the top impermeable layer and loosening the layer below to improve infiltration.

At this point, we would like to refer you to an article by "Die Umweltberatung". In its article "[Types of soil unsealing](#)", it refers to a variety of partial unsealing options.

The new garden areas created in this way offer the opportunity to create diversity for plants and animals. For example, the joints can no longer be neatly scraped out, but deliberately planted. When laying paths, use a sand-humus mixture and enjoy the growing wild herbs.

These unsealed areas can be more costly to maintain and preserve, but the reward is healthy soil for the allotment gardener and an important contribution for their fellow human beings in dealing with the changing climate conditions.