

Soil awareness raising – activities in schools and for the general public in Austria

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Too few people know just how important soil really is and how to manage it properly. This is why a number of activities have been launched by the Austrian Soil Science Society and its members to provide basic soil information to “non-soil experts” promoting the various services soil provides for society and raising awareness as to what each individual can do to protect and manage soil.

Environment Agency Austria and Umweltdachverband [1] have developed teaching material based on the principles of “Education for Sustainable Development”. These booklets provide basic knowledge about soil combined with appealing and creative tasks. These tasks were developed to fit into biology or geography courses as well as into other courses such as mathematics, language training, chemistry, history, informatics, etc.

Pupils and students may actively explore soil properties, soil formation, soil functions and soil organisms in the course of workshops (called “Boden macht Schule”) in schools and in kindergartens [2],[3]. Key elements are the identification of soil animals, creative tasks and experiments appropriate to the pupils’ age showing soil’s ability to clean and retain water. The workshops for kindergartens revolve around feeling the soil texture, exploring soil biota and drawing.

A special challenge for students is the Soil Orientation Run, a combination of physical effort, testing one’s own soil knowledge and cooperating as a team.

At the Vienna Zoo many people get in touch with soil and its properties during the Vienna species conservation days.

2017 a new soil trail with 13 boards will open in Vienna, focusing on the genesis, geology, biology and important functions of the Viennese urban soil. A team of 10 scientists worked on the implementation of this soil trail which will raise soil awareness of the citizens and visitors of Vienna.

The Soil Awareness Guide as a tool of the Austrian Soil Platform shows activities and materials to raise awareness in Austria.

Due to these activities up to now several thousand people were able to get an idea of the importance of soil for our life. By asking children to discuss these topics with their parents, we hope to reach also today’s decision makers and land users while teaching those of tomorrow.

Footnotes:

[1] <http://www.umweltdachverband.at/>

[2] <https://bodenschutz.wordpress.com/>

[3] <http://www.umweltbundesamt.at/umweltsituation/boden/schule/>