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In Germany, garden gnomes are faced with extinction; at least, during one of my walks lately through my neighborhood in one of the suburbs of Mainz, I couldn't detect any of them anymore, not even their cousin, the »Mainzelmännchen« (gnomes of Mainz), a 1960s' creation of cartoon figures for German TV, to separate regular programming from advertising spots, which character for a while enjoyed great popularity. As one can see in the picture, gravel is in, green grass is out. What will come next? Narrow-gauge rails put on the gravel, to operate by remote control a small »garden« choo choo train?

*Oliver Schuster*

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**Today's »evergreen garden«** consists of nothing more than a few (poisonous!) thuja trees with gravel around it. Occasionally, some other features are added.

# High Water and High Summer

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## Summer Spliver enriched by Split

Everything is really interconnected. Let us look at our surroundings and think about micro- and macro-climate. Weather so far this year, with its extreme heat and inundations in continental Europe, was highly unusual. The cause for inundations in Bavaria and the eastern parts of Germany in June 2013 may have been an unusual macro-weather situation. The director of Potsdam Institute for Studies of Effects on Climates (PIK), Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, couldn't refrain from giving his climate-change

and more of the earth's surface with asphalt and concrete. In any event, large areas were under water, houses and farms were covered in muck.

Now, weather has changed again: the official weather forecast of the German Weather Service located in Offenbach (near Frankfurt am Main) for the week-end of July 27/28th predicted a top heat wave. So far this year, Germany's hottest spot was the little town of Rheinfelden, in the south of Germany close to Basel, Switzerland, with »only« 38.6°C [101.5°F], which was below the record of 40.2°C [104.3°F] measured in Karlsruhe as well as in Freiburg im Breisgau, in 2003. The high-pressure system *Zlatka* over Italy and the low-pressure system *Zaki* over the Atlantic directed hot air of the Sahara to Central Europe.

For those whose towns and villages were just recently inundated, the heat was free-of-charge help to dry out the soaked walls of their abodes; others tried to escape to waters or green, shady oases.

### The Pleasures of City Life: Never-ending Party Time

Those city dwellers who live close to a park should count themselves happy: Temperatures are noticeably lower on the lawns in the shadow of trees than in the overheated canyons of city streets. One feels like spreading a blanket on the lawn, lie down on it and contently doze off... were it not for the residues of humans, pets and other animals spread all over the place.

Another fly in the ointment is that often, such green areas are used for evening and night parties, or staging areas for such undertakings, with consequences for the people who



**Marble from Carrara, Italy,** brilliantly white and mechanically rounded is the »non plus ultra«.  
In this example, the white marble pieces are combined with natural gravel from the Rhine valley.  
The larger the size of the pieces, the more expensive they are.

prayer mill another turn... as one would expect from a self-proclaimed »protector of the climate«. On one side, researchers blamed a pronounced diversion of the direction of the jetstream for the continuing rain, on the other side they also suspected the lack of absorption of the rain by the soil cooled out too long during the abnormally long winter season. So much for blaming the rain for all that water... But additionally, we must remind ourselves of the human activity of covering more

live close-by. For example, the hustle and bustle of Frankfurt's Friedberger Markt or Luisenplatz in the northern part of the city even made it at times into the national news, in an unfavorable way. But also the shores of the Rhine river at Mainz see its human masses sunbathing, partying, and grilling. That doesn't please the well-to-do citizens living in one of the waterfront's fancy new residences or tastefully renovated old buildings. Even a sheik from Riad is said to have bought a whole building in that area. He will stay here briefly just once a year, together with his three wives, for his health check-up. Up to now, the whole family had to content itself with suites at the Hyatt Hotel facing the river.

In an open letter to the mayor of Mainz, Michael Ebling (Social Democrat Party), 30 of the residents complained about noise and dirt in the streets near the river. Keep in mind, that in addition to the already in-

stitutional yearly happenings such as the parades on Shrove Monday (Rosenmontagszug), Easter Sunday

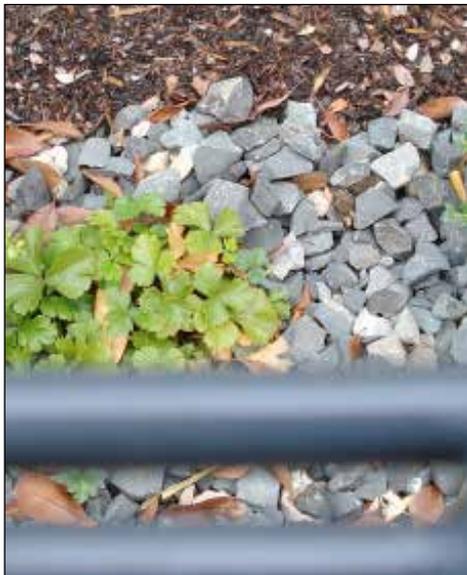


**Lavender Sprouting:** *the only flowering plant in this front yard's inhospitable environment. It was mobbed by bumble bees, but bees were nowhere to be seen. Is that the end of biodiversity?*

masses, the Gutenberg Marathon race, St. John's [Midsummer] Day, and a Beer Festival [Bierbörse], numerous parties big and small are celebrated on the banks of the river turning the beautiful Rhine Promenade into a cesspool (article in *Allgemeine Zeitung* [Mainz] of July 27th, 2013). No wonder that in such hot nights, the city dwellers look with envy at the inhabitants of the quieter, leafy suburbs.

### Once Upon A Time... There Was The Evergreen Garden

Not so fast – a look now at the »leafy« suburbs reveals a surprising and substantial change: There is no more the dream of a »home in the green«. In the past, ready-made rolls of green lawn were transported in even before construction of the new house was completed, to assure a green lawn from the very beginning. A sophisticated sprinkler system made sure



**Revenge of the Green:** *despite the gravel, weeds took hold and start to sprout in its cracks ignoring fabric barriers underneath.*



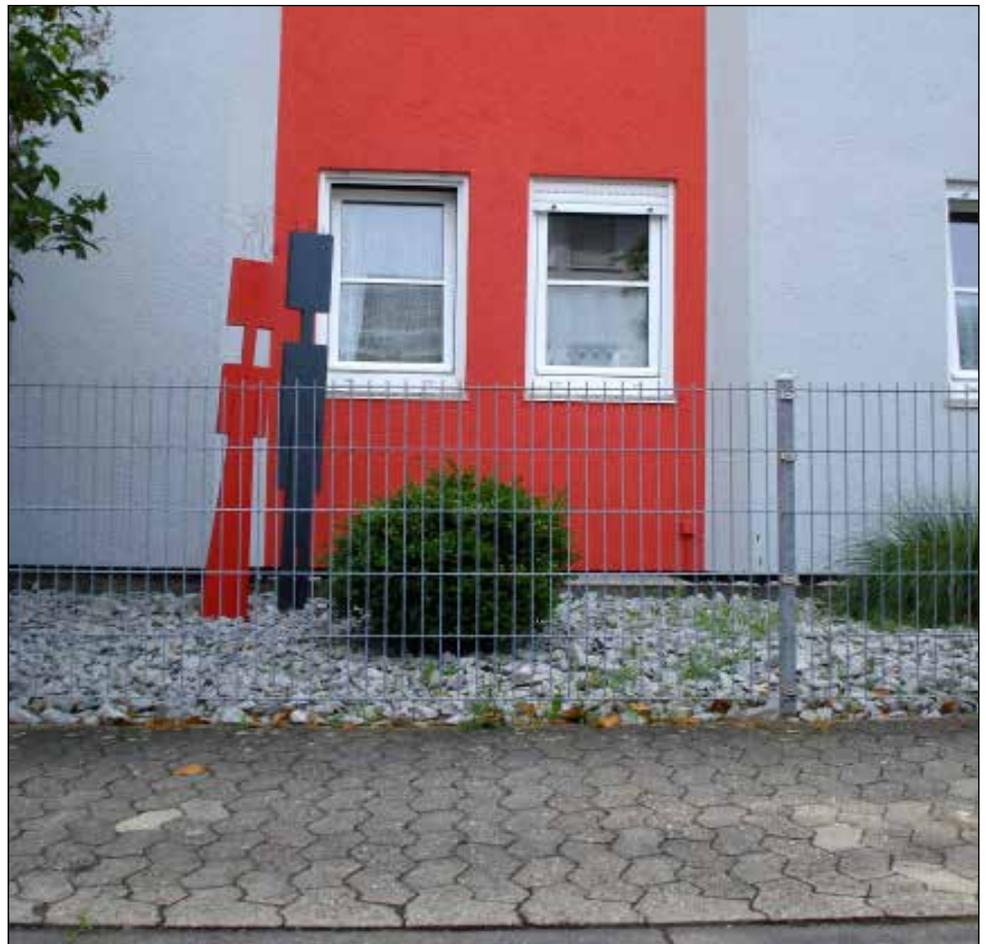
**Wood Sorrel** (*Oxalis corniculata*) has strong roots and is difficult to remove even from regular soil. Should it start to grow among pebbles, only a healthy dose of chemicals may be able to hold it in check.

that the lawn would be irrigated properly – occasionally to the detriment and shrieks of drivers of open-topped convertibles getting a shower free of charge. But that way the lawn was cooled and the water bound to an extent the dust; it was a nice, natural air conditioning system for the residents and the neighbors. Now, promenading down my street in the neighborhood, as well as the next one running parallel to it, I can see that almost every third house has converted its front lawn into a gravel pit.

In olden times, naturally kept inundation areas – marshes or polders – close to towns and cities had been created to take care of excess water, soak it up and thereby prevent inundations of those towns and cit-

ies. Nowadays, the soils are covered and sealed with gravel and stones carried in from other areas. With the newfangled gravel front yards, a similar principle is used: top soil of 20 to 30 cm [8 to 10 inches] is removed, also plants and plant roots. Then a mat of fabric is spread, and atop it the layer of gravel and pebbles. The fabric is touted as being water-impermeable, tear-resistant, resisting growth of plant roots, stable against UV light, being long-life and — how could it be otherwise — environmental-friendly. *Environmental-friendly?* for what or whom, I ask myself. Not that this procedure guarantees over the years an immaculate surface, such as in a Japanese rock garden; with winds dust, seeds, leaves are blown in, stick to

**»The Living Desert«**  
not unlike in Walt Disney's film greens are re-asserting their living space and slowly spreading in an inhospitable environment. Weeding may now be more tedious than in case of a green lawn.





the little cracks between the pebbles, and sooner or later, the rotten leaves will discolor the pebbles, weeds will start to sprout in the cracks. Only little insects will have trouble to get from the underground soil through the fabric to the surface. But even if they manage to do so, or fly or crawl in from somewhere else, they will be in a stone desert, no vegetation, nothing which could provide a lizard, a little bird, an insect, a butterfly with food or a living space.

Carrara marble, mechanically rounded, is so to speak the MERCEDES of all gravel frontyards. Its proud owner can almost be assured that his neighbors full of envy will calculate the pebble diameters with a decoration-pebble counter [Zierkiesrechner] made available by the big DIY-chain OBI. Additionally, value can be added by using pebbles in different colors and by placing them in artistic patterns. A galvanized metal edging of 400 mm [15 inches] diameter, in yin/yang pattern, is reportedly a »hot« item, one side to fill with white, the other one with dark pebbles. Nature will, however, take its course and after a while, the pure-white pebbles will slowly turn moss-green. So, in the future, it's not un-

thinkable that a sophisticated STONE CLEANING SERVICE will then come by and clean the pebbles for a hefty fee – unless the owner will opt for a complete re-doing of his stone garden.

One wonders: with more and more pebble front yards being constructed, will the only occasional complete re-doing of stone gardens help DIY stores overcome their current financial difficulties? Imagine the loss of business that this change of concept from green garden to stone garden brings: No more sales of seeds, fertilizers, garden tools, edgers, weed eaters, lawn mowers, watering hoses. Therefore, will the other DIY stores go the way of PRAKTIKER and MAX BAHR (both recently filed for bankruptcy)?

**NIMBY: The Global Goal of Two-Degrees is Apparently Ignored Here**

As mentioned, Potsdam's climate pope Hans Joachim Schellnhuber is convinced that humans cause global warming leading to climate change. Together with other international institutions he demands that global warming be limited to two degrees [centigrades] above the level of temperatures at the time of the start of

**An Example of »Local« Warming:** Pattern of gravel of red-brown lava and milky-grey basalt – evoking a picture of Brittany's coastline?



**The last piece of soil** is now covered with gravel also.

**A wonder of Nature:**  
plants and weeds are indomitable, as here weeds sprouting in the midst of asphalt and concrete, at a spot between two driveways where it is reasonably safe from being treaded on.



the Industrial Revolution. The question begs to be asked: »Temperatures..., where measured?« And: »How do we arrive at an authoritative value for every place on earth, when there exists locally already a difference of two degrees between stony front yard and green back yard?«

Taking a global posture seem to preoccupy climate researchers more than local problems, such as the heat problems created by locally made stone deserts. How is micro climate affected by [globally and locally] questionable ecological behavior? One can be sure 99% that temperatures of a stone garden are more than two degrees higher than those in a green gar-

den featuring a variety of plants. Because of the heat stored in the pebbles tropical-night conditions can be assured, conditions not much different from those within the built-up city. The heating-up of these formerly green oases can't be doubted. The owners of stone gardens may rejoice at the thought of being relieved of tedious lawn care of yesteryear. The positive effect on its environment of living plants do not have seemed to enter the thoughts of those who »enriched« their front yards with gravel and pebbles. But when it comes to deforestation of rainforests in far-away Sumatra, they undoubtedly will vociferously join the chorus of protesters. □

## Impressum



### Chris Schuth

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