

When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world. John Muir



TERRABYTE 02.06 – BREAK UP THE PAVEMENT

Who cares about soil? It's just the stuff plants grow in and we walk around on top of, right? I mean it's just THE EARTH, our home. Well, if you think about it, the "sustainable" landscape practices we talk about are really just another way of saying that we should take a more gentle approach to landscaping and allow earth to do that thing which it does best – act as the greatest natural filter of toxins and pollution, well...in the world! With water quality and water quantity so much in the worldwide news, water and soil become two of the most important elements in the discussion about changing the way we garden.

Most people don't know that they can use their own garden soil as a filter for rainwater as it makes its way back into the ocean and aquifers, "recharging" the groundwater. When rain falls on roofs, driveways, and other paved (impermeable) surfaces, this cleaning process is bypassed. Unclean water flows off our properties into the storm drains and, along with debris from the streets, flows right into our streams, oceans, and waterways.

A lot of the soot and pollution from your roof is building up in the wetlands. And a great deal of the fertilizer you and your gardener just put on your garden is now flowing down to the beach. (No comment about that for now!) 58 million gallons of runoff PER DAY on a dry day flow into my local waterway, Santa Monica Bay. Personally, I like to go to the beach on a hot day, but **yecch!!** I can't get over it when I think about how much crap from people's back yards is floating around in the ocean or stuck to the sand!

In addition to its role in concentrating pollution in our large waterways, storm water runoff from our properties actually contributes to the total amount of water gushing down our hillsides, causing landslides and flooding. When it rains in Southern California, it often rains in awesome, Noah-esque amounts, and that water is coming so fast and furious that it just hits the asphalt, concrete and stone surfaces and slides right off, barreling down the slightest grade to the lowest point, often a storm sewer. This torrent of water erodes our hillsides and streambeds and takes even more soil and debris with it on its tumultuous journey to the ocean. If runoff had an opportunity to soak back into the soil, rather than

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concentrate in such huge quantities, the soil would be better able to act as the natural filter it is, and our properties would not be in such danger of eroding away.

And so we must try to keep our valuable rainwater on our property to encourage the recharging of our water supply with clean water. In its simplest form this means, break up the hard surfaces around your house, and provide the means for water to get back to the ground.

You can make a difference in your own front or back yard. Think about removing your concrete or asphalt driveway (probably the largest impermeable surface on your property) and replacing it with a more permeable one. Some alternatives are: "Plantable pavers" (sometimes called grass pave); Interlocking blocks or concrete pavers; Compacted gravel or decomposed granite; or re-laying the pieces of broken concrete back in the same place over a gravel base, allowing planting or gravel areas between, which are permeable.

A walkway, path, or patio can be cut with a concrete saw to create 3"-6" spaces between slabs. These spaces can be filled with groundcover or gravel, making the surface more permeable. Or, remove the impermeable surface all together and replace it with plant groundcover, wood chips, or decomposed granite (a golden brown dirt-like substance that, once stabilized with resin or polymer becomes a beautiful, natural semi-permeable surface).

My personal favorite option is pouring what's called porous concrete. This is concrete that allows water to pass right through it. It's made from Portland cement and gravel (no sand), and although it looks like a huge rice-cracker, water flows through it rather than sheeting off it. Using porous concrete allows you to have your rice cake and drink it too - or something like that.

In your community you can make a huge difference. Think about the places your park your car during the day - is it a school parking lot, or grocery store, or bank, or house of worship, or public building, or office tower? If this parking lot is a big, open asphalt or concrete-covered space, get to work on the lot's owners to break up the pavement and replace it with porous concrete. Seriously! Take action! Leave a note on the door of the management office, speak up at the council meeting, complain to the office manager, and tell your kids' friends parents that we have alternatives to poisoning our water, and we'd like to get some help from our mother earth to do it.

Let people know that breaking up the pavement is easy to do.

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