

Word of the Day - "wachsen"

by German-is-easy - Thursday, November 01, 2018

<https://yourdailygerman.com/wachsen-erwachsen-grow-german/>

Hello everyone,

and welcome to our German Word of the Day. This time, with a look at the meaning of

wachsen

And I'm not known to be one to beat around the bush, so I'm gonna te...

"Actually, Emanuel, on your show, you have beaten around the poor bush so much, there's barely anything growing anymore."

Oh yeah? Well, if you didn't interrupt me all the time, I could get to the point much quicker.

"Uhm... we interrupted you ONCE."

Your mom interrupted me once.

"Emanuel, your behavior s not very mature right now."

Hmm, I guess. I waxed my armpits, by the way.

And if you're now thinking "Too much information", well then wait, till you read the article.

There's plenty more information in there ;).

So let's take a look.

Wachsen is the German brother of the English word **wax**. Or actually, we should say of the English words **wax**. Because there are two that have nothing to do with each other.

The first **wax** is the stuff that bees produce. The origin of this **wax** goes back thousands of years and the meaning hasn't changed. The noun in German is **das Wachs** and the verb is **wachsen**.

- Die Kerze ist aus **Bienenwachs**.
- The candle is made from **beeswax**.
(*oh, looks like English does have compounds ;)*

- Ich habe meine Achseln **gewachst**.
- I **waxed** my arm pits.

This is what most of us think of when we hear the word **wax**.

But there's another verb **to wax** in English. The origin of this one is the super ancient Indo-European root ***aug**, which is about the basic idea of "**increase**" and it's the origin of words like **augment**, **auxiliary**, **authority** and - and this is kind of funny - the word **waist**. Yup, the waist is called **waist** because it **grows**.

Now, in English, this **wax** got pushed to the sidelines by the word **grow**; which is related to **grass** and **green** by the way. But German liked **wachsen** and so it is the main translation for **to grow**.

- Die Pflanze **wächst** super schnell.
- The plant **is growing** super fast.

- Maria ist an der Aufgabe **gewachsen**.
- The task made Maria **grow** (as a person).

- Maria will sich einen Bart **wachsen lassen**.
- Maria wants **to grow** a beard.

Now, this last example is extremely frightening for Thomas. But for us it's very interesting, because it highlights a VERY big difference between **wachsen** and **to grow**.

The English, a beard can grow, but you can also grow a beard. That does NOT work in German at all. You cannot **wachsen** anything. **Wachsen** is something the beard does by itself.

Cool.

Now, the noun for wachsen is **das Wachstum** (the growth) and it's pretty straight forward so let's move right over to the pref... oh, hold on, we have a call. Paul from Glasgow, welcome to the show.

"Hello Emanuel, I just wanted to ask how you'd actually say to grow something in German? Like... is it always wachsen lassen."

Oh, great question. No, wachsen lassen only works if the focus is on not trimming. So mainly hair and nails.

"And what about growing plants?"

Oh, there the word is **anbauen**. Though that implies some sort of scale. But there's also **anpflanzen**, **züchten** and **ziehen**.

"Jings, crivvens. So many words."

Haha, yeah.

"Hey uhm... may I ask another question?"

Of course!

"So, what about that spelling. Like, why is chs pronounced like an x?"

Oh, well let me turn that around. Would you rather pronounce it with ch and then s? Like so...

"Uhhh... x is fine."

Haha, yeah, it's really hard to do and the x is kind of a natural result of slurring **chs**.

"Yeah, that makes sense, thanks mate."

No problem. Do you want to stick around for the prefix versions?

"Sure, why not."

Cool.

wachsen prefixed

First up, we have *erwachsen* and *aufwachsen*. Both are about *growing up*, but they're not interchangeable.

Aufwachsen has a focus on the process of growing from a child to the age of adulthood.

- Ich bin Berlin *aufgewachsen*.
- I *grew up* in Berlin.

- Kinder, die in Armut *aufwachsen*, haben es schwerer, erfolgreich zu werden.
- Children who *grow up* in poverty have a harder time becoming successful.

Erwachsen as a verb is a very pompous sounding word for *arise* and it's pretty rare.

- Aus großer Macht *erwächst* große Verantwortung, Bruce.
- From great power *arises* great responsibility, Bruce.

What IS common though, is *erwachsen* as an adjective.

"Oh wait, so it's one of those verbs where the ge-form looks like the infinitive, right?"

Exactly. And *erwachsen* as an adjective is THE word for *grown up*, in a sense of being an adult.

- "Thomas, ich mache ab jetzt jeden Morgen vor dem Kaffee Yoga."
"Puh, du bist sooo *erwachsen*."
- "Thomas, from now on, I'll do yoga every morning before the coffee."
"Phew, you're so *grown up*/such a *grown up*."
- "Warum können wir nicht wie zwei *erwachsene* Menschen diskutieren?"
"DU kannst nicht wie zwei *erwachsene* Menschen diskutieren, ich schon."
- "Why can't we just argue like two *adults*?"
"YOU can't argue like two *adults*, I can."

And while we're at it, for animals you'd say **ausgewachsen**. There, the focus is really that it has reached its final form, if you will :)

- Das Horn eines **ausgewachsenen** Einhorns wiegt eine Tonne.
- The horn of a **fully grown** unicorn weighs a ton.

"Wow, I didn't know they were so heavy."

Yeah, it's crazy right? And from what I've read, they drop it like every two years and then it grows back.

"Yeah, I read that, too."

And speaking of growing back, that brings us right to the next verb - **nachwachsen**. Literally, it means "to grow after" and it's used in contexts of stuff re-growing, but the noun **der Nachwuchs** also carries the idea of the *next generation*.

- Wenn man einer Eidechse den Schwanz abreißt, **wächst** er **nach**.
- If you rip off the tail of a lizard it'll **grow back**.

- Dieser To-Go-Becher wurde aus **nachwachsenden** Rohstoffen hergestellt.
- This take away cup was made from **renewable** resources.
(*only for stuff that actually grows, so not renewable in sense of sunlight*)

- Die Katze bekommt **Nachwuchs**.
- The cat gets **offsprings**.

- Der **Nachwuchsschauspieler** bekommt einen Preis.
- The **up and coming actor** gets an award.

"Wow, would not have thought that the combo *chssch* is actually possible."

Haha, you're right. I didn't even notice. But hey, while we're at it... here's another really vowel-heavy word:

Wirtschaftswachstum (economic growth)

Wirtschaftswchstm

"My God, so many consonants. "

Yeah, I'd kind of like to know how it feels to look at a word like that as a non-native speaker.

"It's daunting, believe me."

I bet. It'll get easier over time though, when your brain learns to cluster stuff.

Anyways, the next verb I'd like to mention is **durchwachsen**.

Taken literally, it means something like "to grow through" but just like **erwachsen** it is pretty much only used as an adjective. And only in two rather specific contexts. The first one is meat marbled with fat. It is "grown through" by fat.

- Das Rinder-Filet ist **durchwachsen**.
- The beef filet is **marbled/streaked**.

And for some reason, it is also used as a colloquial term for **mediocre** (or less). It's not super common but it's one of those words that will seriously impress your friends when you use it right.

- Das Essen war gut, der Service eher **durchwachsen**.
- The food was good, the service was **meh**.

"Wait, for what reason is it used in that sense again?"

Some. For some reason.

"Oh... uh... I see."

Cool.

Now, there are several others but I think you can actually guess them from context so I don't want to go over every single one.

I do want to mention the pair **einwachsen** and **reinwachsen**, though.

Both are about something growing into something, but **einwachsen** is pretty much only used for nails and hairs. For all other contexts, like growing into a role or a some piece of clothing, you'd use **reinwachsen**.

- Thomas pult an seinem **eingewachsenen** Zehennagel herum.
- Thomas is picking around at his **ingrown** toenail.

- Das Einhorn ist in seine neue Rolle als CEO der Märchenwald AG **reingewachsen**.
- The unicorn has **grown into** its new role as CEO of the Fairytale Forest Inc.

And then, I'd also like to mention **zusammenwachsen**. Not because it's tricky to understand but because it a REALLY great example for how it can actually matter whether something is written together or

separate. **Zusammenwachsen** as a prefix verb means a growing into one another. **Zusammen wachsen** mean that you each grow but you do it together, as a team.

- Partnerschaft bedeutet **zusammen zu wachsen** ohne **zusammenzuwachsen**.
- A relationship means **growing together** without **growing together/coalescing**.

"Wow, that's kind of deep."

Yeah, it's from a post card.

Hey, I have a weird question though..."

Go ahead.

"So... what about if you and your partner wax together. Which version would that be?"

Hahahaha... that would be **zusammen wachsen**. You see, on a very abstract level, the prefix of a prefix verb adds some notion of direction. So if we were to add **zusammen** as a prefix to the wax-**wachsen**, we'd get a verb that implies that we join two things by waxing them.

"Ahhhh, I think I get it. My understanding of prefix verbs has just *gewachsen* a little. Danke, mate!"

Well thank you for asking!! And thanks for joining me, it was great having you.

And to all you learners out there, thank you for tuning in, as well. This was our look at **wachsen** and its versions. I'll add a few more to the vocab list, but I think they'll make sense to you.

As always, if you have any questions or suggestions just leave me a comment.

I hope you liked it and see you next time.

Get the vocabulary as a .csv to import into your flashcard app: [download here](#).
(separator is a semicolon ;)

** vocab **

wachsen (gewachsen) - grow (by oneself)

wachsen (gewachst) - to wax (hair)

das Wachs - the wax

die Wachsfigur - the wax figure

der Wuchs - how something is grown

das Wachstum - the growth

das Wachstumshormon - growth hormone

das Wirtschaftswachstum - the economic growth

aufwachsen - grow up (focus on growing and aging, usually for people)

ausgewachsen - fully grown (almost exclusively used as an adjective for animals)

durchwachsen (adj) - marbled (for meat), meh (colloquial term for "not so good")

erwachsen (adj) - mature, adult, grown up

der Erwachsene - the adult person

erwachsen aus - rare verb for "to arise"

einwachsen - to grow in (usually for toenails or hairs)

in etwas reinwachsen - grow into something (usually some sort of role or piece of clothing)

nachwachsen - regrow

nachwachsende Rohstoffe - renewable resources (stuff that grows, NOT the sun)

der Nachwuchs - the offsprings, new generation

der Nachwuchsspieler - junior player, up and coming player

überwachsen (adj) - grown over

über sich hinauswachsen - surpass oneself

verwachsen - grown together, grown in a weird way (usually used as an adjective)