

The Role of DIY and Gardening in Coronavirus Times

BHB - Retailers' Association for
Home Improvement, Building and Gardening



Editorial

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The coronavirus pandemic has affected all of our lives and wreaked havoc on the economy. While demand for our products and services remains high, due to the lockdown, our accessibility is restricted in many cases.

More than 4,000 sites and their employees want to help customers solve their problems and enable green and creative potential to be realized. The often different interpretations of the Coronavirus Protection Ordinance, up to the local level, challenge our retailers, as well as our suppliers, service providers, and logistics specialists. From the complicated organization of the supply chain to the rapid creation of suitable infrastructure, e.g. for customer-friendly processing of Click & Collect or Click & Meet—all of this is often made difficult by constantly changing regulations.

But how are our customers faring in the face of this challenging situation and how can we best support them? We commissioned a study to find answers to these questions.

We deliberately chose the renowned Cologne-based rheingold Institute for qualitative market research. The depth-psychological methodology used by the institute enables us to have a greater understanding of what really moves people and explains deeper motives that are valid beyond the current pandemic situation. We would like to thank the rheingold team as well as the numerous respondents in the study who participated in intensive interviews and discussions lasting several hours.



In addition to the many insights, it was also uplifting to see, based on scientific confirmation, how deeply connected people are with our offers and the important role we play in their lives. For all of us in the industry, this glimpse into the souls of our customers is highly motivating and a source of inspiration in these times and beyond.

Dr. Peter Wüst
(Managing Director BHB)



Study Design

Within the framework of the study, ten participants were explored in two rheingoldGroups® and 16 participants in rheingoldInterviews®, each lasting two hours. The studies do not focus on statistical representation. A team of psychologists uses the rheingold methodology, which has been developed and validated for decades, to search for consistent and intersubjective cause-effect relationships, where complex descriptions and contexts of experience among a variety of people are similar. If the detailed descriptions of many individual subjects show consistent similarities, we can conclude that even a small sample is highly valid and psychologically representative. The specially trained psychological researchers create a trusting atmosphere that enables the respondents to open up in the interviews and groups. They use psychological techniques to enable respondents to provide surprisingly detailed descriptions and develop new perspectives.

Each year, rheingold conducts around 5,000 depth-psychological interviews. Since last spring, the institute has investigated and analyzed the different stages of the psychological impacts of the pandemic. rheingold takes a cultural-psychological approach, i.e. all studies on politics or brands embed the research topic into the current societal situation.

Inhaltsverzeichnis

- | | | |
|--|---|----------|
| 1 | Introduction – the Coronavirus and Self-efficacy | Seite 4 |
| 2 | The Psychology of Gardening | Seite 6 |
| 3 | The Psychology of DIY | Seite 8 |
| 4 | Learnings for a Time with and after the Coronavirus | Seite 10 |
| 5 | Arguments for Opening | Seite 11 |

Introduction – the Coronavirus and Self-Efficacy

At the beginning of the pandemic year 2021, Germany was increasingly characterized by demoralization, aggressiveness, and hopelessness. Germans mourned the loss of time in their lives yet at the same time looked for opportunities to make their lives meaningful and vibrant.

On behalf of the BHB (Handelsverband Heimwerken, Bauen und Garten e.V.) the Cologne-based rheingold Institute carried out a depth-psychological examination of the mood of Germans in February 2021, focusing on the meaning and function of garden centers and DIY stores in coronavirus times.

The atmosphere in the explorations was very emotional and open, and the respondents were happy to unburden themselves of their frustration and be able to talk with eagerly listening psychologists. In order to counteract the stagnation, they want to take action and come up with clever concepts to counteract their perceived limited freedom during the pandemic.

However, they experience policies as being rigid during the lockdown, with lockdowns being considered the only tool to combat the pandemic. The response to this strategy is largely to delegate responsibility to politicians and institutions. The fight against the virus is externalized and no longer seen as a challenge that people have to cope with themselves.

Most can only endure the stagnation of the lockdowns by taking action. Many of the harmless pleasures enjoyed during the first lockdown—jigsaw puzzles, cooking, board games—have become insipid and no longer suffice to meet basic psychological needs for creation, impact and self-efficacy. Activities that are perceived as self-efficacious and meaningful and give people some perspectives again are particularly helpful in the face of the increasingly agonizing feelings of loss of lifetime. Gardening, for example, is part of the natural process of growth and decay, and people can create freedom for themselves through DIY projects in their own homes.

People in lockdown have found their own garden to be a healing refuge where they can plant to combat their powerlessness. Psychologically confronted with their own vulnerability and mortality, the garden is a place that allows them to get in touch with this natural principle and find consolation.

Hardware and gardening stores, in turn, equip in a psychological sense, they help people arm themselves with tools for all kinds of situations in life and let them experience pride in their self-efficaciously finished projects. It's also about countering the deterioration of their environment. They describe repairing damage to their homes as being just as "systemically relevant" as filling the fridge.

DIY supplies are a human right, after all.
I'm not an animal that only needs to be fed
by the supermarket!

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Lockdowns are perceived as universal punishments for three reasons:

- **Lack of perspective:** Instead of figuring out "HOW to live with the virus" and working out clever hygiene concepts, people are still waiting for a massive reduction in the number of cases.
- **Disproportionality:** While supermarkets with narrow rows of shelves are less and less concerned about hygiene and schools are reopening, hiking vacations in remote climes remain banned and large hardware and gardening centers are closed.
- **Moralization instead of pragmatism:** Among the opening strategies and measures discussed, instead of learning from good hygiene concepts (e.g., hardware and gardening stores), it is prioritized what MUST be done due to increasing moralization (e.g., opening of schools).



Overall, people are perplexed about how to get through the pandemic well. The vacation mood of the first lockdown and the joy of the coronavirus caesuras in the summer and fall have faded. Today, people are thin-skinned—they experience themselves and their fellow human beings as being increasingly irritable and aggressive, they always have the same social contacts (family, partner, children), who get on their nerves, or they are very lonely (singles).

Many are desperately looking for ways to make everyday life more varied and vibrant (and in the best case, virologically harmless). The fear of the coronavirus has receded into the background. Today, people are more afraid of further lockdown extensions and the aggression of their fellow human beings and are looking for psychological nourishment that is "allowed" during the pandemic.

The color is gone. It's as if everything has become black and white.

“ ”

Four trends are driving personal lives in response to the pandemic:

- 1 A return to the tried and tested.
- 2 A renaissance of the do-it-yourself lifestyle.
- 3 Pursuit of a new work-life balance.
- 4 A revision of personal relations.

The Psychology of Gardening

The garden has been the place of freedom for me. It's been the space of free opportunity.

One's own garden is more than just an ordinary hobby: gardening always means tending to one's private little paradise, where the world is still in order. The garden is as an oasis where people can take a deep breath, come to rest, forget the world, and even can feed themselves if necessary.

While gardening, people can enjoy all the lush, colorful splendor and diversity of flowers, herbs, and plants, and create an individual design to represent themselves to the outside world. In their garden, they reassure themselves of their vitality and of the natural rhythm and continuity of life. Things grow and flourish, only to decay again—everything is in a state of development. During gardening, stress and pent-up aggression evaporate automatically. With one's hands in the soil, the scent of herbs in one's nose, and fresh air in one's lungs, one feels naturally recharged.

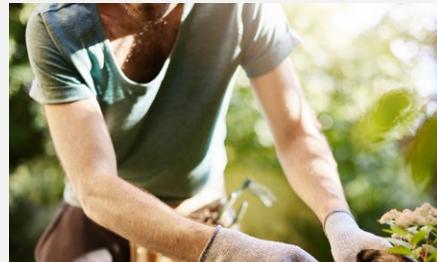
The psychology of gardening shows that it serves as an antidote to the coronavirus

Living in an intact world



Preserving an oasis

Enjoying diversity



Shaping growth & decay

Sensual escape

Recharging batteries



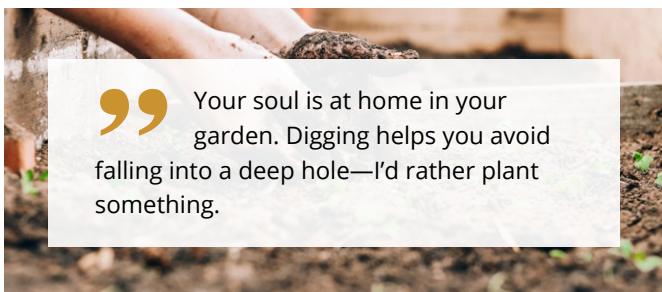
Taking a deep breath & pausing



Experiencing effectiveness

Living in an intact world

The garden and supplies for it from garden centers are a reliable rock during the pandemic. The flowers are blooming, the coals on the barbecue are glowing, and the beer tastes the same as always—the world in the garden remains beautiful and unaffected by any coronavirus measures. Home offices are moved to the garden, friends are invited there, and the garden multifunctionally serves as a safe substitute for many things that have fallen by the wayside.



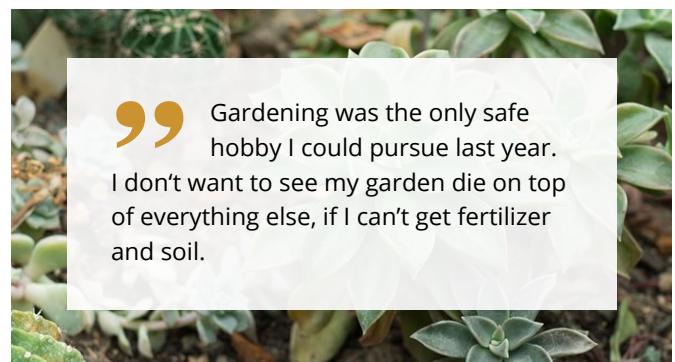
“ Your soul is at home in your garden. Digging helps you avoid falling into a deep hole—I’d rather plant something.

Experiencing effectiveness

While one is powerless against the virus and feels increasingly helpless in the face of the lockdowns, in the garden one can still rule over nature. Roots are pulled out, hedges trimmed, lawns mowed. One sees the results of one’s work, can sweat and prove one’s masculinity or femininity, can let off steam.



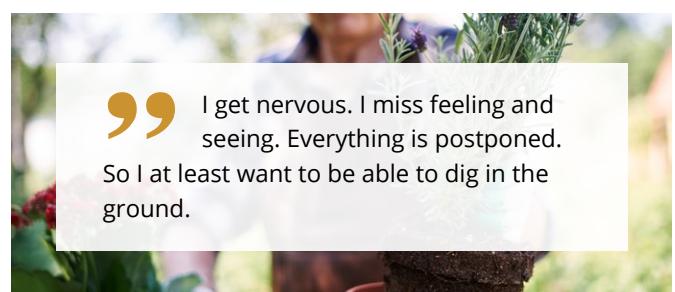
“ Outside everything is dead, in the garden, life is flourishing.



“ Gardening was the only safe hobby I could pursue last year. I don’t want to see my garden die on top of everything else, if I can’t get fertilizer and soil.

Recharging batteries

In the garden and during gardening, people forget about the everyday and coronavirus-induced stress. They breathe more freely and come to rest. Like a meditative source of strength, the garden seems to increase people’s resilience and reduce their irritability and aggression. As a result, they can find themselves again and thus better face the current difficulties in their lives.



“ I get nervous. I miss feeling and seeing. Everything is postponed. So I at least want to be able to dig in the ground.

Sensual escape

Due to the elimination of many services and the necessary contact restrictions, daily life has become grayer and duller—but the garden continues to sprout cheerfully. The possibility of maintaining the familiar variety of vegetables and flowers, the tastes and smells in the garden, brightens up the dreariness of the pandemic. Outside of state paternalism and restrictions, one can enjoy the lush, colorful, constantly changing power of the garden.

Psychological reactions to the prolonged garden center closure:

- The crisis is invading (and destroying) paradise
- Resilience is dwindling, stress

- Powerlessness
- Boredom

3

The Psychology of DIY

The hardware store creates a link between imagination and reality. When you see a grill, you imagine having one and sitting outside in the summer.

One's own apartment or house are supposed to be preserved as a protected space at all costs—it offers a sense of wellbeing, freedom, and security. Protection and maintenance of one's "fortress" requires constant preservation from deterioration.

Armed with hammers, screws, and materials from the hardware store, as well as advice, instructions, and tips, one feels physically and mentally equipped for a project. And one can regularly replenish one's supplies.

After being inspired at the hardware store, one can either continue to dream about a project (and thus develop a future perspective) or actually implement it and experience self-efficacy and pride in one's work. Consequently, one shows oneself and those around that one can still create something within a slightly smaller circle of life!

Regular mood-changing DIY measures serve as a substitute for vacations and a change of pace, especially during the pandemic. Trapped in the small circle of the own home, one decorates and designs as one pleases and thus gets a longed-for "change of scenery."

The psychology of DIY shows that it serves as an antidote to the coronavirus

Building independence



House & yard maintenance

Creating living space



Atmospheric change of scenery

Feeling safe



Empowering armor

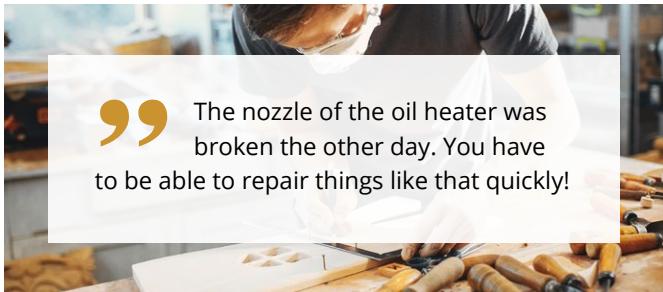


Making dreams come true

Letting off steam

Building independence

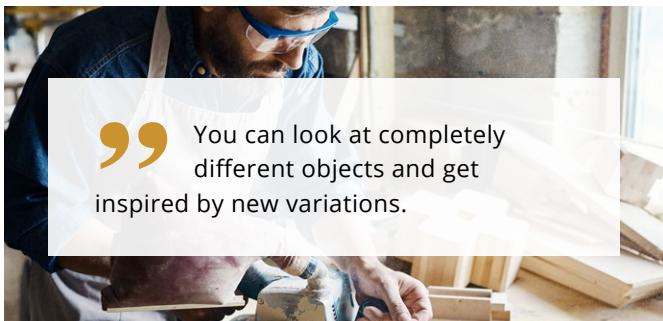
To compensate for increasingly eliminated options and fallbacks, people have moved many external pursuits indoors: they set up a home gym in the attic, spruce up their home office, or build a sauna in the garden. In this way, the normality lost outside persists in a new form inside one's own four walls. Taking pride in one's work alone or with others, one feels less powerless and more oneself again.



“ The nozzle of the oil heater was broken the other day. You have to be able to repair things like that quickly!

Letting off steam

Carrying out DIY projects helps us release pent-up energy, frustration, and aggression and channel them into meaningful paths. Drilling at night, hammering away in rubble, and implementing a project to the end lead to experiences of self-efficacy that are longed for not only during the pandemic. People feel more relaxed after doing work at home and undergo a kind of DIY catharsis.



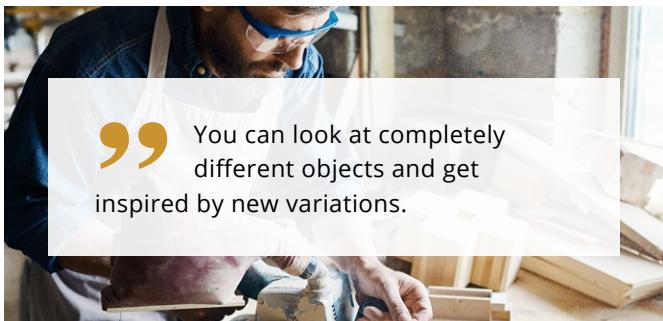
“ You can look at completely different objects and get inspired by new variations.



“ We redid the floor. My daughter helped out, and when we finished, my wife and I had a glass of champagne. I felt like a man again.

Feeling safe

While the world is shaken up outside, everything should be working properly within one's own four walls. Knowing that the hardware store is a quick and easy place to go for repairs and other maintenance work, is a great psychological relief. One can effectively arm the own home against any crisis at any time and constantly make improvements in the event of an increased need for protection and safety.



“ At first, I get annoyed about the work, but in the end it's gratifying—there's a moment when I forget everything around me.

Making dreams come true

Reinventing oneself, excelling, or broadening one's horizons usually occurs in different contexts such as social exchanges or traveling. At the moment, realization of development dreams is only possible in the domestic context. The hardware store serves as a source of ideas and implementation aid. People can reinvent their living environment or interior design style and thus open up new spaces, contexts, and moods.

Psychological reactions to prolonged closure of DIY stores:

- Anxiety about getting supplies
- Aggression and frustration

- Powerlessness
- Boredom and melancholy

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Learnings for a Time with and after the Coronavirus

The pandemic and the lockdowns have revealed the essential needs that hardware stores and gardening centers meet, and how much they contribute to mental balance and health. The crisis has brought these needs to the surface and, due to the absence of other distractions, focused and amplified them as though through a magnifying glass. Hence the pandemic is an opportunity for the category—despite all adversity and limitations—to better understand customers on a deeper level and to build a stronger emotional bond with them.

Gardening centers and hardware stores are both literally and figuratively the life source of the garden and home. With this knowledge, even after the coronavirus pandemic, the industry can target its customers more effectively and create new offers.

The garden center is a bastion of resilience whose health aspect cannot be overstated. The home improvement store, in turn, is a safeguarding and inspiring enabler responsible for many positive DIY effects that allow people to survive a crisis in a mentally healthy way.

For the future, this means that the tried and true will be experienced as even more valuable and do it yourself will undergo a true renaissance. Self-sufficiency will continue to be very important, and there will be a great demand for suppliers, services and brands that enable emancipation from a world that is perceived as increasingly unstable.

People have the feeling that one crisis is followed by another: the financial crisis, the climate crisis, the refugee crisis, the coronavirus crisis. It seems as if we are experiencing the downfall of a decadent civilization.

The pursuit of “higher, faster, further” will be realigned, and finding meaning will become more important. Sustainability will also play a major role. Brands and products that recognize this and send out clear, meaningful messages will have an advantage. In this respect, too, the coronavirus crisis acts as an incubator for change. Accordingly, it is essential for hardware stores and garden centers to continue to be part of the solution and not the problem. More than almost any other industry, they are in a position to drive people’s increasingly emancipated, self-sufficient, and sustainable lifestyles and to shape them with their support. This should be reflected on all levels—and communicated accordingly.



I feel like I'm drifting through the ocean on an ice floe, which is getting smaller and smaller. If the garden centers were open, at least the ice floe wouldn't get smaller!



Psychological Arguments for Opening in Compliance with All Hygiene Rules

Open gardening centers guarantee:

- An important virologically safe domestic refuge for recharging one's batteries.
- A feeling of self-efficacy and resilience in uncertain times.
- A change of pace and diverse opportunities for self-expression and experiencing of individuality and development.
- Protection of a small part of one's life that remains untouched by the coronavirus crisis.



It's almost medical.
A natural healing process.

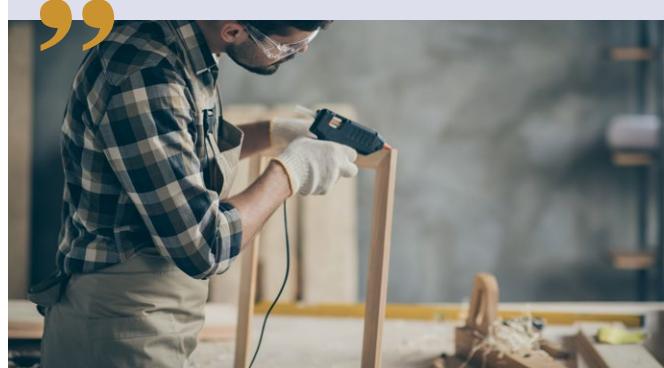
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At the supermarket, everyone squeezes through the narrow aisles and the disinfectant is always empty, but hardware stores and gardening centers with plenty of room are closed?

What's important is that I can go there quickly.
That if something is missing, I can get it there.
That makes me feel secure.

Open hardware stores guarantee:

- A sense of being actively involved in rebuilding by creating spaces in one's home (e.g., home office or gym) despite the limitations.
- To be able to reinvent, inspire, and realize oneself again and again at home, depending on one's mood and needs; to avoid boredom, hopelessness, and frustration.
- That consumers feel a sense of supply security.
That they are not left alone with repairs or project problems, but can obtain equipment and advice quickly and easily.
- That during a DIY project one can experience a sense of self-efficacy and satisfaction that compensates for the stagnation and thus significantly reduces aggression.



IMPRINT

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