



STRONG!

The garden helpers

Gardena is a synonym for high-quality garden tools – and also a prime example of a glistening brand. The founders laid the foundation over 50 years ago – with a strong focus on design and the color turquoise, among other things. The fact that this choice of color was probably more of a coincidence makes its success story even more interesting.





A “color code with signal effect – not only at the point of sale,” explains Martin Rauch, Gardena’s Head of Design.

Never before have we seen such interest in gardening as in 2020 – in the first year of the pandemic, Gardena posted a whopping 13 percent sales increase. This increase likely applies, at least in tendency, to the entire gardening industry. Nevertheless, Gardena is right at the forefront, probably also because the company has its eyes on those hobby gardeners who, on the one hand, approach the task pragmatically while always keeping an eye on the fun factor and well-being. And something else speaks for the success of Gardena: The trust in the brand. Trust is enormously high, according to the research published in the *Wirtschaftswoche* in October last year. Gardena ranks a full 17.2 points above the industry average. And in the most recent “Best Brands Award”, the company came an impressive ninth place overall – behind Bosch, Lego and WMF, but ahead of Coca-Cola. The award is based on studies by GfK consumer research, which assesses not only economic success but also consumer perception.

At the beginning, there was the hose connector

Gardena seems to do everything right – and has done so for more than five decades. Right from the beginning, the founders were aware of the importance of design and branding. Clearly ahead of their time in the 1960s, when design took place in only a few forward-thinking companies or at universities. For example, the School of Design in Ulm (HfG Ulm), which – founded among others by Otl Aicher, Inge Scholl and Max Bill in 1953 – saw itself in direct tradition of Bauhaus. Eberhard Kastner and Werner Kress also moved to Ulm in 1962. The year before, in 1961, they jointly founded ‘gardening equipment sales’, which in 1966 became Gardena. Even before then, the two were working on a new type of connector for garden hoses, which was supposed to replace the common but cumbersome hose clamp fixings. The idea almost failed because the material of the day was metal which made the connector heavy and expensive. Plastic, according to Kastner and Kress’s calculation, could solve these problems. In search of people with relevant material experience, the two founders approached



“We use orange for crucial functional elements.” Here, the iconic connector for garden hoses – the original Gardena system.

the HfG design team. Dieter Raffler, a design student, took on the challenge and was responsible for design at Gardena together with his colleague Franco Clivio from then on. In addition to product design, the duo was also responsible for the brand’s look that invented the original Gardena System in 1967.

Turquoise – a random color?

The connection system, perfected and patented by the designers, soon became the new standard for the garden enthusiast. Colors played a key role in building the brand: a trio of turquoise, orange and gray that is still valid today. Turquoise might seem like an odd choice, at least from the point of view of a brand strategist. “The story goes that a product was repainted with a leftover color. The result was spontaneously liked, and turquoise stuck ever since.” Says company spokesman Heribert Wettels. In retrospect, it was a stroke of genius, because turquoise did then – and still does today – stand out, in an industry dominated by reds and yellows. The Gardena orange was introduced with the “Original Gardena System”. The color was more in line with the contemporary tastes of the time. “This color combination was clearly different, fresher and stood out at point of sale,” says Head of Design Martin Rauch. In autumn 2017, he joined the garden specialist as Director of Brand Design. Previously, Rauch, a graduate of the renowned University of Design in Schwäbisch Gmünd, worked at Teams Design for eleven years, most recently as Senior Manager Global Design. He also spent three years in charge of the Shanghai office. Today, he heads Gardena’s in-house design team,



Photos: Gardena

“Turquoise serves as the accent color and the warm grey provides the background”. The exception: the blue of the special edition tools sold for the benefit of the UN children’s charity organization UNICEF.

which currently consists of ten people, primarily concerned with the design and conception of new products. “Design is a key differentiating factor for us and is becoming more and more important, which is why we are currently expanding our capabilities.”

Form over styling

The standout color combination sets Gardena visually apart from its competition and its products would be recognized instantly. Actually, this hasn’t changed to date and even the color values have remained identical – “only the application has changed, in that we use the brand colors in a slightly more subtle fashion,” explains Rauch. “We are currently using orange to highlight essential control elements, which makes a lot of practical sense. Turquoise serves as the accent color and the warm gray provides the background. It’s important for us to have consistent colors across the different materials we use to produce our products – color matching and intense quality control are therefore essential. “Because our colors aren’t part of a standard color system, we have to produce our plastic in so-called masterbatches which are especially manufactured for us.”

The unmistakable brand colors quickly made Gardena instantly recognizable.

Incidentally, you won’t find a traditional design manual at Gardena. Instead, Martin Rauch’s product design team works with a guide that “doesn’t define fixed design elements, but a scale that identifies the DNA of the brand”.



Gardena, at its core a manufacturer of manual garden tools, is also embracing digital technology in its solutions and systems.

This open principle emphasizes the family character of the product range – “it’s also more flexible and encourages completely new ideas”.

A DNA for design

Today’s Gardena range comprises more than 700 products, from hand-held tools and sensor-controlled irrigation systems to robotic lawnmowers. Product design must connect all of these variations and bring them together under the brand umbrella. “Historically, this was easy, with a much more manageable product portfolio. Today, we need more freedom, not least because we want to be more emotional.” However, according to Rauch, that doesn’t mean we should be random, on the contrary: “The basis is always a geometric grid, from which we then develop the respective designs. Our robotic lawnmowers don’t look high-speed; they look friendly. The aim is simply to find the right form for the product and the brand, we don’t want styling. That connects us with the teaching of the HfG Ulm”.

Rise of the machines?

“We make the user our center focus to every product,” explains Martin Rauch. That’s of course changing fluently: While our ancestors plowed the all-important kitchen garden out of necessity for being self-sufficient, in the 1970’s the front gardens of our homes were transformed, displaying pretty easy-care lawns. Gardena focused on creating products that made gardening easier and more enjoyable. Since the beginning of the 2010s, we have seen another transformation: the garden has been rediscovered, in various forms, from raised beds on balconies to rented allot-

ments on the outskirts of towns and cities. We now look to gardening for relaxation, to slow down, connect with nature and even rediscover ourselves – a countertrend to the merciless urbanization and digitization, striving for perfection without friction. “Our customers are getting younger again; many live in cities, they are more diverse, but also less experienced”, summarizes Heribert Wettels. “And it’s about fun.” All of which makes Gardena the perfect helper.

The so-called “Smart Gardening” concept, which at first glance might look like a contradiction to the target audience profile, but it’s a new interpretation of Gardena’s core promise. The promise to making hard work easier. That was as much the case 50 years ago as it is today – for example, the tireless robotic lawnmower, the automatic watering system or the plant analysis sensor. According to Gardena, these solutions not only create more time for the enjoyable aspects of gardening but also help all those who want to get into gardening but don’t have any experience. “We make dreams come true,” says Heribert Wessels. The smart garden is not the goal but the tool that enables people to enjoy a more rewarding garden, promising a more immersive experience than a one-dimensional green lawn.

New skills and systems

Not only technically but also in terms of brand design. The smart helpers should work as invisibly as possible, regardless of whether they are sensors or irrigation systems. How the brand is newly interpreted is demonstrated by the new “Smart Sensor”, which is simply pushed into the ground



The smart helpers are designed to work almost invisibly.



Photos: Gardena

Our robotic lawnmowers don't look high-speed; they look friendly.

The new skills required are called 'user experience' and 'interface design'.

to measure soil humidity and temperature. While black is the dominant color, turquoise appears as an accentuating line – a style repeated on the associated control and gateway boxes. This design concept defines a new look for smart products, appreciating the need for unintrusive integration into the garden while still clearly linking them to the Gardena brand. Gardena, with its origins in manufacturing of manual garden products, is also becoming more digital. The new skills required are called 'user experience' and 'interface design', which is why Gardena created its own digital center in the innovation hotspot Zurich. Gardena can also tap into the know-how of Husqvarna, the Swedish company that acquired Gardena in 2016 and paved the way for the Gardena robotic lawnmower through technology transfer. A win-win situation because Gardena now contributes a whopping 22 percent to the sales of the Husqvarna Group.

Analog is here to stay

The latest product idea shows that Gardena hasn't forgotten its origins even in these digital times. "ClickUp!" is based on a simple pole. Inserted into the ground, it transforms into a stand for various modules. A birdhouse, for example. Or an insect hotel, a rain gauge, an open flame torch, even a planter. "That was quite an experiment," said Rauch. "Since the 'system concept' is very important to us, we had set ourselves the goal of designing several interchangeable elements." The ideas developed by the design department were tested at the end of 2017 when they reached out on social media to receive feedback from their audience. Now

the "functional decoration idea" is a reality and available to purchase. It is precisely because of its surprising simplicity that "ClickUp!" is so charming and versatile. Incidentally, completely without sensors.



Color matching and intensive quality control: "Because our colors aren't part of a standard color system, we have to produce our plastic in so-called masterbatches which are especially manufactured for us."

GMG's innovative color management solutions ensure that packaging can be reliably produced with the desired color effect – even when produced at different locations and using varying production processes.