

# The Spring 2013 River Ridge Report!

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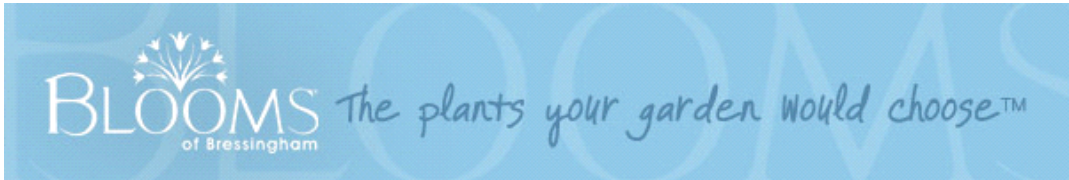
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## The Spring 2013 River Ridge Report

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### Bad news, kids

Bad news, kids: Gardening in my neighborhood, River Ridge, is down. Plummeted to just 60%, or only 214 out of 356 homes. That's down 3% from last year (63%), which tied with the lowest level of gardening since I started the survey. And we're down a full 10% from 2006 when gardening hit 70% in River Ridge. That's 36 fewer participating families out of 356.

	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
Households that Garden	60%	63%	68%	63%	65%	63%	68.5%	70%
Hanging Baskets	42	41	42	43	47	48	43	41
Containers	82	71	66	83	78	77	77	72
Plants in the Ground	26.5	28	35	31.5	46.5	41.5	49.5	49
All Three	10	10	14	6	17	12.5	16	18
Plastic Flowers	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Bummer.

I won't say I didn't have a feeling that gardening in my 'hood—both in participation and level of apparent expenditure—had taken a hit. The season started way late (Mother's Day weekend, of which only one day was good) and then proceeded in fits and starts until June when it finally turned nice. Since then, the gardening has been excellent—mild, plenty of rain to keep stuff looking good.

But I suspect some folks just never got around to it. One neighbor admitted as much. As we drove slowly past her and two friends and explained what we were doing, she exclaimed, "Wait, don't count my house yet, I haven't had a chance to garden!"

We told her to get busy.

So down 5% from the average participation of 65% over the past eight years ... that's just 20 homes. Is that really that big a drop? Maybe I'm making too big a deal about it. I don't want to bring you down.

Plus, that leaves 214 wonderful households out of 356 that DID garden—three out of five—so let's show them some love, shall we, and analyze how they gardened.

First, it did look like expenditures were down. No way to know that, of course, other than by size of the display. There are a few folks who go overboard every year, and we love them for it. But mostly we saw two or three baskets, two or three pots, and the equivalent to a couple of six packs worth of annuals in the ground.

Another reason to guess that expenditures are down is that only 10% of gardeners had all three categories, baskets, containers and plants in the ground. That ties last year, but is down eight points from the high of 18% in 2006 (2010 was the low point, at 6%). Average over the eight-year period is 13%.

### **Containers**

Containers are by far the gardening method of choice in River Ridge, this year showing up at 82% of all households that gardened (just one percentage point below the all-time high of 83%, recorded in 2010). Containers ranged from 6-in. grower pots to fancy urns, and included some hanging baskets that either never got hung up or were purchased with the intent of using them as a pot, not a basket.

We saw plenty of simple geraniums and petunias with spikes, and a few that had a bit more style, but very few you'd call elegant or over the top ... River Ridge just doesn't seem to be that kind of neighborhood (for that, you have to drive across the tracks to the \$700,000 homes in Silver Glen).

We saw some pansies and snapdragons still going well, thanks to the mild weather. And unfortunately, we saw (but didn't count) some empty pots left over from last season.

### **Container color: gray wins**

Credit my wife, Laurie, the crazed terra cotta pot collector for gathering this data. She was curious what colors were most popular with River Ridge gardeners, so she took note of color choices as we drove.

No. 1 by a wide margin was gray, at 43% of all containers (of the 131 she spotted). In a distant second was beige/tan, at 16%, followed by brown (10.7%), black and terra cotta (tied at 10%) and red (6%).



### **Hanging Baskets**

At 42%, basket popularity is down a tad from the high of 48% in 2008 and is just half the popularity of regular pots. And, as the chart shows, while containers have increased somewhat since 2006, baskets have remained flat. Although they did show a bump in 2008-2009, during the worst of the recession. Wonder if folks used them to cheer themselves up? Or maybe the typical basket is less expensive than the typical container? But no, that can't be it, because container use remained strong in those years.



The violas are hanging on into July. My guess is these won't be replanted.

### **Plants in the Ground**

The category that's made the biggest, yet least surprising, downward slide. Just 26.5% of River Ridge gardeners



planted anything directly into flower beds this year. That's down 1.5% from last year and nearly half as many as in 2006 (49%). Truly, folks don't want to dig in the native River Ridge soil (which, in their defense, is more hard clay than loamy topsoil).

Unfortunately, while plants in the ground have dropped 22.5% in eight years, we haven't seen a corresponding increase in containers (up just 10% in that time period). So I guess those sales of bedding plant flats have simply evaporated.



### **Plastic Flowers**

We count plastic décor in the Fall River Ridge Report and decided this year to look for plastic flowers. We found them at 15 (4%) of the 356 homes in River Ridge. But what was shocking, 10 of those 15 homes also had real flowers. So they weren't being used instead of real, but in addition to. Maybe that's good news?

### **Meet Bertha Mireles**

Bertha, at 549 South Collins in River Ridge, may be the community's most avid gardener. She's got a spectacular display every year, both spring and fall. I popped by this morning to photograph her front yard and she was out watering it, so I introduced myself.



"I love all the color" was her simple answer to why so many pots of flowers. And she invited me to see the back yard, which was just as spectacular (reinforcing my River Ridge survey premise that if people garden out back, they also put something out front).

I asked where she likes to shop and she quickly named a town in Indiana where she buys from an Amish grower. Gets great plants at very good prices, she explained. She didn't seem aware of varieties, sticking more with favorite genera like petunias.

Anyway, that's the Spring River Ridge Report for 2013. Questions or comments or observations from your own neighborhood, let me know [HERE](#).

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See you next time, in the regular *Acres Online*,

*Chi*

Chris Beytes  
Editor & Publisher

