

## It's the Fall River Ridge Report!

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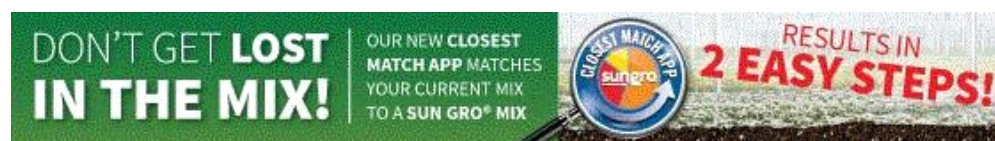
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# GrowerTalks' Acres Online

*News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine*

## Flowers—Up!



And to a new record high among my 239 neighbors (out of 356) who decided to decorate for fall this year. That's the happy Halloween news from the 2018 Fall River Ridge Report\*—brought to you by the fine folks at [Sun Gro Horticulture](#). Sun Gro could sponsor any neighborhood gardening survey, yet they chose this one, showing how quality-conscious they are. Thank you, Sun Gro!

Now back to our regularly scheduled program.

Flower consumption is up in River Ridge, to 34% of those who decorated for fall. That's the highest figure in the life of the survey, and well above the 11-year average of 26%. My question is, "why?"

But wait, let's step back a bit to the big picture:

Overall, fall decorating in River Ridge is up just .5% to 67%—which is just two more decorated homes than last year, 239 vs 237. Since 2007, the percentage has ranged from a high of 81% in 2010 (during the Great Recession) to a low of 63% in 2016 (a presidential election year). We're still below the 11-year average of 70%, but not by much, and we seem to be creeping upwards over the last three years. But based on the small sample size (356), it doesn't take too many folks to decide to skip the mums, pumpkins and skeletons to impact the data.



A nice display featuring all three main categories: flowers, ag products and plastic decor.

### About those flowers

My survey covers three main products: fall flowers of any sort; other once-living agricultural products such as pumpkins (far and away the most popular), straw bales and corn stalks; and any other artificial seasonal decoration, which I put under the flattering heading of “plastic.” For fun, we separate out those big inflatable decorations (“air” on my clipboard tally sheet). And those who do nothing for fall go into the “party poopers” category (“zip” for short).

All of this year's numbers are pretty much dead on the average—within one percentage point, in fact, as you can see in the chart:

	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013*	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	10-year average
<b>Homes that decorate</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>66.5%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>65%</b>		<b>71%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>Party poopers</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>35</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Fall Flowers</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>26</b>		<b>31</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Pumpkins, corn, etc</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>80</b>		<b>61</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Plastic décor</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>75.5</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>63.5</b>		<b>75.5</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>All Three</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>14.5</b>		<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Inflatables</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>

*\*No Fall report this year. I have no idea why.*

I can understand that when it comes to plastic décor; I mean, you just pull it out of the basement or attic, dust it off and put it out, year after year.

But you can't do that with pumpkins and corn stalks. You have to buy those fresh, which takes effort. Of course, every retailer I frequent has had bins and pallets and rows of agricultural products for the past month, so it's not much of a chore to source those items.

Which leads to flowers: Why the 11-point jump over last year, and 8-point jump above the average? As a local consumer, I can't say that mums were any more available from local retailers this year than in the past. Everybody stocks them, and in every size.





Lots of mums ... but definitely past their prime by October 28.

Was it a better growing season, so quality was better? You growers who serve Chicagoland will have to answer that question.

One insider told me that she thought the big boxes may have had earlier and better availability—and unfortunately, the ... wait, let me count ... the six nearest retailers to River Ridge are all chains of one form or another, including Menards, Home Depot and Walmart.

Weather-wise, fall was hot, then wet, then cool—not an ideal gardening season by my standards. I will say that many, if not most, of the mums we saw were past their prime—in many cases weeks past. In fact, we were a bit worried that folks would have discarded the evidence of their fall purchases. But I needn't have worried; one thing about my neighbors is they leave dead plants out for months. Alas, some never get around to planting them in the first place ...





I'm quite pleased that we saw a bit more than just mums on folks' front stoops. We saw three pre-made fall combo planters, and a smattering of kale, peppers, swiss chard, heuchera and one aster plant (which, upon further exploration, was planted last year and came back up this year, so it doesn't officially count, but still, well done Adriana!)

One last category that was up by a tad was "all three," meaning folks with plants, agricultural products and plastic décor. In other words, they went all out. That was 15.5% of those who decorate, the highest level since 2012 and 2.5% above the 11-year average. So while only two more people gardened, three more people decided to really cut loose.

Oh, as for those dreaded (or beloved, depending on your point of view) inflatables? Sixteen folks had them, compared with 17 last year.



For inflatables, these are quite nice! The dragon's stomach glows with fire and his nostrils spout flames while his wings flap in the wind.

Beyond that, what else can I say about River Ridge, other than that Christmas is coming and along with it the 4th Annual River Ridge Holiday Greens. Hopefully, it will be warmer when we do it than it was in 2017, when it was a balmy 5F for our drive through the neighborhood. If not, I'll have to get Sun Gro to issue Laurie and me some official Sun Gro wool caps!

*\*The River Ridge Report is my annual survey of my South Elgin, Illinois, neighborhood, to determine the garden habits of the 356 households. My wife and I drive each of the streets, counting garden products in front yards (because we figure that anyone who gardens out back also does something by the front door; also, I'd rather not be arrested as a peeping Tom). We do a spring report, fall report and a winter greens report.*



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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chi".

Chris Beytes

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