

The 2020 Fall River Ridge Report

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October 30 marked the day Laurie and I drove the 14 streets of River Ridge counting garden mums, kale, pumpkins, corn stalks, skeletons, ghosts and inflatable goblins and the results are finally tabulated for the 2020 edition of the Fall River Ridge Report. Did the success of spring trickle over to fall? Did my neighbors get carried away with Halloween decorating as some sort of reaction to the pandemic? Will Joan ever find true happiness? Wait, wrong program ... Find out right after this word from our sponsor ...

Friends, I know you care about your crops. You love them like your own children—more, maybe—and you put their comfort above your own, getting out of bed at all hours of the night to stoke the boiler and check for drafts. Folks, if your plants could talk, they would ask for potting mix from Sun Gro Horticulture. It's loaded with peaty goodness from the finest Canadian bogs. Trust Sun Gro to love your crop as much as you do!

Now, back to our program ...



A good example of someone decorating with all three categories.

In a nutshell, fall decorating was up just one percentage point over 2019 to 66% vs. 65%. That equates to just four additional households that decorated out of 356. Still, up is better than down, especially in a pandemic year that could have gone either way.

But where we did find good news—great news, even—is the extent to which those decorators invested in agricultural products: 79% of them bought pumpkins, hay bales or corn stalks, up from 62% last year. That’s the second-highest percentage since I started this survey.

Here’s the full chart (party poopers are those who did not decorate):

	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013*	2012	2011	2010	10-year avg
Homes that decorated	66%	65%	67%	66.5%	63%	72%	65%		71%	71%	81%	69%
Party poopers	34	35	33	34	37	28	35		29	30	19	31
Fall Flowers	34	34	34	23	30	20	26		31	31	23	28
Pumpkins, corn, etc	79	62	61	58	62	68	80		61	49	65	63
Plastic décor	79	77	76	75.5	71	70	63.5		75.5	77	80	74
All Three	19	18.5	15.5	14	16	12.5	14.5		16	11	15	15
Inflatables	7	8	6.5	7	6	5	4		5	6	8	6

**No Fall report in 2013. I have no clue why.*

Alas, I wish the agricultural boost extended to OUR end of agriculture: live plant material. But as you can see, the number stayed exactly the same as last year: 34%. That still ties the highest percentage recorded, and is well above the average of 28%, but one would always like to see it grow. I wonder if it has anything to do with tight availability? They got to the store and couldn’t find anything? I know we bought early specifically because we were worried about supply. Then again, I had inside information.

We don’t jot down the specific genera we spot, but memory tells me it was probably 95% mums. We spotted very few cabbage/kale and even fewer mixed fall combinations. I recall one house that had a pair.

Also, of the mums we saw, many were already past their prime. I blame that on early demand and early supply, combined with weather that wasn’t cold enough to keep them fresh. And we’ve got some 70F temps happening this week, which will put an end to them. Pity, because there are none to be had to replace them with for Thanksgiving. But I guess that’s okay, it’s almost holiday greens time!



We saw a lot of mums like this in River Ridge. (We also saw a lot of dead spring planters yet to be dumped.)

But back to pumpkins, corn and other agricultural products: I'm happy to see that, at 79%, it tied with the general catch-all category of "plastic décor," always the number one category in my survey. That means that, for some reason, folks felt the urge to buy and maybe even carve a pumpkin this year. And it was pumpkins, because that by far was what we saw the most of, ag product-wise.

The mention of carving gives me a hint: Perhaps with many kids still doing school at home, pumpkin purchases and decorating became part of class time or downtime entertainment?

Any of you have a guess? Let me know [HERE](#).

I counted a slight increase in another area and that is "all three"—the folks who decorated with plants, agriculture and plastic. Call them the hardcore decorators, they climbed to a new high of 19% of those who decorated, up from 18% last year and well above the average of 15%. That might go back to what I said before about folks being home.

A category that's not on the chart is what I affectionately call the "fall purist"—those who forego the tacky plastic stuff and stick only with natural products. Last year, that was eight of the 232 homes that decorated, or 3.4%. This year, the number climbed a bit to 12 out of 236 that decorated, or 5%. Under normal circumstances, I'd be one of those purists. But wanting to make all hallow's eve more fun for the pandemic-stricken kiddos, we whooped it up and hung up some cheap plastic ghosts, spiders and caution tape, and constructed a pvc "snicker-spitting pumpkin." We dressed as ghosts, drank cocktails and shot candy bars down to the waiting pirates and princesses. (We learned that Reese's don't fit inside 2-in. pvc, so we had to eat those ourselves.)

As always, if you've got thoughts about autumn that might explain some of what I found, let me know at beytes@growertalks.com. And once again, a warm thank you to Sun Gro Horticulture, the official potting mix of River Ridge.



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