

River Ridge: Gardening Up Five Points Over 2020!

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It's River Ridge Report time!



It is too soon to dub the 2021 edition the “post-pandemic River Ridge Report”? I don’t want to jinx us. But regardless, it is time for the annual Spring River Ridge Report, in which my wife and I drive the 14 avenues, lanes, streets and courts of our middleclass suburban Chicagoland neighborhood to see if and how my 355 neighbors are gardening. We evaluate their fronts yards only, for two reasons: 1) I believe everyone who gardens out back also does something out front; and 2) I don’t want to be arrested as a peeping Tom.

But first, a quick show of appreciation to our magnanimous sponsor, Sun Gro Horticulture, maker of fine potting mixes for both professionals and home gardeners. Friends, don’t trust your valuable crops to just any media company, trust them to Sun Gro, whose unyielding standards ensures you a consistent mix week in and week out. Click the links above or below to learn more.

Now, back to our regularly scheduled newsletter ...

The headline from this year?

As Vic Ball would have put it, River Ridge—Up! But how much? A solid 5 percentage points, to 65% participation, compared to 60% last spring. That’s 231 households out of 356, up from 213 last year—an increase of 18 gardening households. That’s the highest level of gardening since 2015, and it’s also 3 percentage points above the 14-year average.

Here are all the stats for 2021 compared to previous years:

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	14-year avg
Households that garden	65%	60%	58%	52.5%	58%	60%	66%	60%	60%	63%	68%	63%	65%	63%	62%
Hanging baskets	46	40	46	41	40	34	38	43	42	41	42	43	47	48	42
Containers	77	81	80	82	80	76	62	80	82	71	66	83	78	77	77
Plants in the ground	20	35.5	21	25.5	25	24	24	23	27	28	35	32	47	42	29
All three	4	5.5	9	9	8	6	8	8	10	10	14	6	17	13	9

Note that it's the third year of increase in a row, from the dismal 2018's 52.5% (looking back, I blamed **that year** on poor weather). This year, weather was excellent early on, and while Mother's Day itself was rainy, the rest of spring was mild until a heatwave and drought hit in June. Now we have to see if it's an upward trend, or if River Ridge has simply returned to its naturally occurring gardening level.

Containers

As with every year of this report, containers (meaning any sort of vessel other than a hanging basket) rule, and this year container use among those who garden fell right on the 14-year average, 77%. Now, when we say "container," we aren't necessarily implying a large mixed combo. Most of what we see are 12-in. or smaller monoculture pots. In fact, mixed combos, especially large, nice ones, are somewhat rare in River Ridge, despite their ubiquity at local retailers. I guess my neighbors prefer the mass of color offered by one variety, although we do see good old dracaena spikes in quite a few.



Nothing is more American than a pair of geranium planters.

In the past, we've tried sussing out container color trends, but the choices cover too broad a spectrum, with no color dominating, to bother counting.

Hanging Baskets

Next most popular are hanging baskets, with 46% of gardeners displaying them. That's 4 points above the average and close to the all-time high of 48% in 2008.



Baskets, hanging, and baskets as pots. (Plus some nice mixed combos.)

The number of gardeners who *purchase* hanging baskets is actually higher than that. However, we've established a rule: It's only a hanging basket if it's hanging. If it's displayed on a stand or sitting on the porch or ground, it's a container.

Again, 10 in. dominates the size. As for genera? Again, it runs the gamut: begonias, petunias, calibrachoa, New Guineas, Boston ferns and some other assorted foliage.

In the Ground

Always the smallest category, plants planted in the ground is smaller than ever this year, at just 20% or 1 out of 5 gardeners bothering to dig a hole in the earth. Last year, it had boomed to a near-high 35.5%. Perhaps that excitement to do some "real" gardening didn't pay off last year, and folks decided to stick with easier container gardening. Granted, when we do see plants in the ground, it's generally a few packs at most, and never a big, colorful, well-grown display.

Trend: Front-yard veggies

Speaking of real gardening, we spotted something new in River Ridge front yards: vegetable plants. If they had been there before, we hadn't noticed. But this year we quickly spotted at least four front yards sporting tomatoes and/or pepper plants growing in pots or in the ground. One gardener had several pots of herbs by the front door.



Tomatoes in piggy planters—a first for River Ridge.

A close examination of this house below reveals a tomato plant growing at the feet of the Virgin Mary. (I also note plastic water bottles being used as irrigation device.)



Quite the eclectic mix, eh? Note the green wall made of foliage pots.

That's it from River Ridge! Got questions or comments? Email me at beytes@growertalks.com. The next River Ridge Report is late October, when we compare fall gardening to Halloween decorating. In the meantime, I'll see you in the weekly *Acres Online*!



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Thanks for reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'Ch' followed by a stylized flourish.

Chris Beytes

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