

The River Ridge Winter Greens Report!

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It's River Ridge Report time!



Did the foul weather occurrence known as winter storm Elliott blow some of my neighbors' winter greens right off their front porches? That's the only explanation for the 5.5 percentage points decline in fresh cut greens use among my neighbors—from 20.5% of decorators down to 15%. That's about 17 homes, I calculate—a biggish number—but hopefully it's not an indication of a downward trend.

Speaking of Elliott, why did the weather boffins decide we had to name winter storms the way we do a hurricane? Isn't "The Blizzard of '22" good enough? It was good enough for "The Great Blizzard of '78"—which even has its own Wikipedia page! Plus, that way we don't forget what year it occurred!

But I digress.

Welcome to the 9th Annual River Ridge Winter Greens Report, wherein I tell you how my 355 neighbors and I decorated our homes for Christmas and any other winter holidays one may celebrate! My wife and I drive the 14 streets of suburban River Ridge, in South Elgin, a distant (40 miles) suburb of Chicago, to get a feel for the outdoor decorating mood of a small slice of the American middle class populace. We do the same thing with spring annuals and fall décor, too, as you probably know.



Not quite sure how to classify this bit of decor ...

Before we dive into the data, a brief word from our sponsor, Sun Gro Horticulture, loyal supporter of all three annual River Ridge Reports. Friends, if you haven't already done so, might I suggest you give Sun Gro's fine potting mixes and media products a try with your next crop? You won't be disappointed! Just click on either advertisement for more. Now, back to our regularly scheduled River Ridge Report.

It was a balmy 43F on Wednesday, December 28, as we drove River Ridge counting greens and décor—a nice change from a few days ago when it was below zero! In fact, we put off doing the Report until it was a bit more clement.

As for the data, we counted 281 homes out of 356 that displayed some form of holiday decorating, from impressive displays to a tiny lone wreath. That's 79%—a strong figure compared to spring gardening (59% this year) and Halloween decorating (75.5%)—but still below last year's 82%. That leaves 21%—about a fifth of my neighbors—classified as non-decorators (I no longer call them Scrooges as I know there are many reasons not to decorate).

Here's the chart:

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	8-yr avg.
Decorated	79%	82%	81%	79%	76%	77%	72%	82%	79%
Non-decorators	21	18	19	21	24	23	28	18	22
Greens	15	20	14	17	19	20	16	24	18
Only Greens	4.5	4	4	7	6	6	7	6	6
Fake	95	96	96	94	94	94	92	94	94
Both	10.5	16	10	10	13	14	8	18	12
Inflatables	15.5	11	10	10	11	10	5	8	10

Two notes about that figure: First, 79% is dead on the 8-year average. And 79% is the third-highest figure I've recorded. So it's nothing to panic over. It's still nicely above 2016's low of 72%.

The kind of decorating we are most interested in is done with fresh-cut greens, as they are 1) agricultural products and 2) most often sold by wholesale growers, nurseries and retail garden centers. In fact, some of you have turned greens into a big part of your winter business! As I pointed out at the beginning, that number is down, alas, to 15% of my decorating neighbors from 20.5%. Fifteen percent is the second-lowest greens figure since I started the survey, with only the pandemic year of 2020 beating it (14%). The 8-year average is 18%. As I said, I hope it's not a trend! But perhaps not, as last year was a strong 20%.



Our favorite example of fresh-cut greens.

Laurie and I discussed the possible reasons. She thought the late cold snap could have dissuaded some last-minute greens decorators, but I disagreed, thinking most get their greens up well before Christmas. Availability isn't an issue—you can find the stuff at every retailer. But we both agreed that perhaps prices are up and that has put off some shoppers. Think you know why fresh-cut greens use might be down a bit? Let us know [HERE](#).

What greens are those?

The difference between the Winter report and our Spring and Fall reports is that I do the driving. Not for snow and ice reasons, for I.D. reasons—Laurie is better at telling the difference between real greens and plastic greens (she used to sell them). So she gets that duty of tallying up the types of greens we spot. Which were, in order of popularity:

Type of greens (actual count, not percent)

	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015
Container/Pot	27	25	24	24	26	20	12	13
Wreath	20	30	13	19	26	23	23	49
Garland	10	10	9	8	12	25	15	14
Swag	3	6	4	4	1	5	6	6

Containers—27 of the 43 decorating households (15%) with real greens had pots of them by the front door. And most of them were premade from The Home Depot or Costco. That's up from 25 containers last year. In fact, look again at the chart and note the growth of containers since 2015.



We saw a lot of these premade containers.

Wreaths—20. Down from 30 last year—a serious drop! Again, note the chart—49 wreath-users in 2015 to just 20 this year. Sad!

Garland—10, compared with 10 last year, and consistent with the historical data.

Swags—3, compared with 6 last year—another big decrease, but swag are used by only a few homes and tends to be up and down year-to-year.

Then there are the specialized greens: We also saw two crosses, one kissing ball, and one mailbox blanket—coincidentally, the exact same numbers of those items as last year (we don't track greens use by house to be able to tell

if it's the same people using the same stuff or not). Just 13 households (4%) would be what I call purists, displaying ONLY fresh-cut greens—no lights, no plastic candy canes, nothing.



Real garland ... but what about the wreath? That's where Laurie's experienced eyes come into play. She deemed it real, too.

The rest of the decorating

With just 13 households displaying only greens, that leaves 268 households doing decorating the old-fashioned way: with plastic garland, plastic wreaths, fabric bows, lights and more lights, and those fun inflatables—which, by the way, were up in use from 11% last year to 15.5% this year.

We even saw one of those giant skeletons repurposed into a big—albeit skinny—Santa.

Which reminds me: It was amazing how many dead hanging baskets folks haven't taken down. Why go to the trouble to pretty up your front stoop with Christmas décor and not remove the dead calibrachoa? Ah, well ...

To sum up: Winter holiday decorating in River Ridge was down just slightly, but not enough to raise eyebrows—we matched the 8-year average. Folks are decorating! Fresh-cut greens use was down more, and that is bothersome—I'd hate to think fresh greens were going out of fashion, or had taken on some sort of negative baggage of being unsustainable or something. Lastly, among greens, mixed combo pots remain the most popular, followed by wreaths, garland and swags.

That's it from River Ridge for this winter. Comments, insights or questions, just email me at beytes@growertalks.com.

Next time we're on the topic of my neighborhood, it will be the middle of summer and we'll be talking spring gardening. And after this harsh December, I can hardly wait!

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Chris Beytes

Editor

GrowerTalks and *Green Profit*

beytes@growertalks.com