

# The Fall 2024 River Ridge Report!

BE IN THE KNOW

*Late-breaking news from GrowerTalks magazine*



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2024

subscribe



## GrowerTalks' Acres Online

*News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine*

### It's River Ridge Report time!



It was a beautiful crisp fall Friday afternoon in River Ridge. A slight breeze in the air with sunlight beaming through branches of the trees, cascading light through summers' last vestiges of leaves, now hues of brown, red and orange. And Laurie and I ... well, we weren't in her Jeep Cherokee driving the 15 streets of my neighborhood to study the fall decorating habits of the Midwest families occupying its 356 homes. We were in Orlando at our new home and it didn't make sense to fly all the way back to Chicagoland just to count flowers.

Which is where publisher and right-hand man Paul Black and his lovely and smart wife Annie come in. In our stead, they drove River Ridge in their Honda Pilot, he at the wheel, she manning the official River Ridge clipboard, as they both observed and discussed the flowers, agriculture products and plastic Halloween décor they were seeing in my former neighborhood. They only called once—to inquire if leftover spring flowers counted for anything.

"Nope," I replied. "It's got to be fresh mums or kale or pansies ... something you can tell they bought fresh this fall."

But before I continue their story, a quick thank you to our sponsor, Sun Gro Horticulture, purveyors of fine-quality peat moss products. I'll wager the best-looking containers in River Ridge are grown with Canadian peat!

Now, back to the adventures of Paul and Annie!

Wrote Paul of their first River Ridge experience, "It seemed like a lot of folks took off the afternoon early and were out enjoying the nice weather, walking their dogs or pushing strollers down the sidewalks. There was even a pesky door-to-door salesperson giving us some cover and taking the heat off of our suspiciously slow driving. On occasion, we spoke with a few residents as we drove past their houses, usually to compliment their decorations if they seemed to take notice of us and to ask if we could take some photos ... The entire survey took us about two hours. We were running low on gas when we started and I told Annie, 'Don't worry, it'll be fiiiiine.' We pulled into Costco two hours later with the car's range indicator at 1 mile. Perfect!"

Paul and Annie did a fine job of tabulating the fall decorating in River Ridge for 2024. They captured all 356 homes (passing the first test). And the data is close enough to previous years to tell me they knew of what they counted. Here's the official 10-year chart:

	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	10-year avg.
Homes that decorated	66%	69%	75.5%	77.5%	66%	65%	67%	66.5%	63%	72%	69%
Party poopers	34	31	24.5	22.5	34	35	33	34	37	28	31
Fall Flowers	42	34	36	35.5	34	34	34	23	30	20	32
Pumpkins, corn, etc	59	55	64	67	79	62	61	58	62	68	63.5
Plastic décor	79	83	75	78	79	77	76	75.5	71	70	76
All Three	22.5	19.5	24	21	19	18.5	15.5	14	16	12.5	18
Inflatables	9	9	13	7	7	8	6.5	7	6	5	8

### Decorating overall: Down 3 points from the average

A decline is always disappointing to see. At 66% decorating participation (236 homes out of 356), River Ridge is down from 69% last year (246 homes), which is right on the 10-year average. It sounds like a lot, but it's just 10 homes. And I know for a fact that one of those is my old house, which used to always deliver mums and pumpkins. This year, 1 South Conway Court falls in the "zip" category.

Really, though, study the data: 2015 was great, then we took a long dip down to the same level we are now, including the 2020 pandemic Halloween (when we gave out candy via a PVC chute, remember?). Then folks went crazy with the decorating in '21 and '22, as you can see, going more than 10 points higher than usual. But if I toss out those abnormally high scores, our average drops to 67% and now we're not in a decline.

One might even go so far as to bring up election years, as 2016, 2020 and 2024 do seem to be a bit lower than average ... but I doubt that plays into Halloween décor.

### Flowers: Nicely up!

Here's the most important data point for our purposes: Paul and Annie counted flowers and plants at 42% of the homes that decorated—up a full 8 points over last year and 10 points above the 10-year average. I might be worried they were counting fake flowers as real, but experience tells me you don't see plastic mums or kale in River Ridge at Halloween (and we'd sorted out the leftover spring flowers issue before they started). Paul tells me fall has been warm and dry, with temperatures ranging from 75F in the day down to 40F at night—"perfect conditions for outdoor activities," he reports. Such as visiting garden centers.



As for varieties ... well, River Ridge isn't known for its variety. Mums dominate. Kale/cabbage is No. 2. You'll see a few snaps, a few peppers, a few pansies, but not much else. This year, studying Paul's photos, I saw the same. Although I did spot a cyperus surrounded by mums in a large blue pot (above). The same house also had a tall pot of pansies. And a nice collection of gourds.



### **Pumpkins: Up a bit, but still below average**

Pumpkins, gourds, straw bales, corn stalks, Indian corn ... these are what I classify as ag products—stuff that a farmer grew that's no longer alive. Long a staple in fall décor, ag products rose 4 points to 59% of decorators, but still below the average of 63.5%. This category hit its peak (77%) in the pandemic year of 2020—was that because bored folks got out and visited farm stands and fall festivals, which are ubiquitous in the Midwest? Possibly—those farms were deemed “essential,” I believe. Toss out that outlier and 58% isn't bad. (I should mention 2014, when this category hit 80%, despite an overall decorating rate of just 65%. Talk about an outlier! No telling what spurred the interest in pumpkins that year!) Anyway, it's still good to see that three out of five decorators still choose some natural products to go along with their 12-ft.-tall skeletons.

### **Plastic décor: Everywhere**

Up or down, it's still the No. 1 way to decorate for fall in River Ridge. This year, 79% of decorators said it with plastic spooks, down from 83% last year, but up from the average of 76%. If you've been in a box store lately, you know that manufacturers have come up with a thousand new ways to clutter up your yard with horrifying plastic fright-gear designed to scare the you-know-what out of the kiddos. River Ridge, being solidly middle class and filled with kids and teens, had its share of the stuff stalking cemeteries and climbing walls.



It just occurred to me that one of my categories, inflatables, may no longer be relevant. Nine percent of decorators (about typical) had inflatable Halloween decorations. But have those been supplanted by the giant skeletons and animatronic werewolves? Should I count those big new scary plastic decorations separately from a tasteful plastic fall wreath or a Casper the Friendly Ghost? Probably not.

### **The serious decorators: Also up**

Go big or go home ... or should I say, go big ON your home? That's what 22.5% of decorators did, investing in all three: flowers, agriculture products AND plastic décor. That's up from 19.5% last year, down from 2022's peak of 24%, but nicely above the average of 18%. This seems to be a growth category going all the way back to the early days of this survey, when only 11% to 15% of folks spent the time and money to decorate with all three categories. But you can see the steady increase over the last 10 years.





Looks like all three in this photo—I see plenty of plastic, two mums and I'm pretty sure two stacked gourds next to the right-hand mum.

### The purists

It's not in the chart, but I like to capture the data on those like myself, the tasteful, who decorate only with natural, organic, farm-raised products—flowers and pumpkins and corn stalks and the like. This year, that number was good: 11 households out of 236 (1.5%). Last year it was just four households out of 246 (4.5%). Support your local farmer, not the Chinese factories!

Well, that's it from River Ridge for this year, where, based on the data, fall decorating—including flowers and agricultural products—remains an important part of the American middle class lifestyle. How to get them to buy more flowers for their cemeteries? Maybe make your packaging or sales message more relevant to the season or the holiday—less fall and more fright, perhaps.



You tell ME! How are you successful in getting your neighborhoods to add more fall flowers? Email me [HERE](#) with any

questions, comments or ideas.

Now, excuse me, as I suddenly find myself in the mood for a caramel apple ...



The #1 brand  
for all your  
gardening needs



**BLACK GOLD**  
Another quality brand from  
**sungro**  
HORTICULTURE  
[blackgold.bz](http://blackgold.bz)

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

Chi

Chris Beytes  
Editor-in-Chief  
*GrowerTalks* and *Green Profit*  
[beytes@growertalks.com](mailto:beytes@growertalks.com)