

The Spring 2025 River Ridge Report!

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Here it is, folks—the much-anticipated, thoughtfully ruminated, never-duplicated 2025 Spring River Ridge Report! Brought to you by the fine folks at Sun Gro Horticulture for the umpteenth time in a row. Thanks, Sun Gro—you guys are swell!

As a recap for you newbies, River Ridge is my (former) middleclass neighborhood of 14 streets and 356 homes in South Elgin, Illinois. Each spring, my wife and I toured the neighborhood looking for signs of gardening, her driving and self manning the clipboard as we each call out the house number and then “baskets,” “pots,” “in the ground” or “zip” according to what we can see in each front yard (we’ve always assumed if people garden out back, they garden out front, too). Then I tabulate the findings to determine the gardening habits of my neighbors year to year. I came up with the idea way back in 2003—23 River Ridges ago.



Now on to the shocking news

Alas, this is the first time since 2003 that Laurie and I did not do the survey ourselves. That's because in late 2023 we moved from River Ridge to Orlando, Florida, and the Wedgefield neighborhood*. Last year, we flew back over the Independence Day holiday to conduct the report; this year, my right-hand man, publisher Paul Black, and his lovely and spirited wife, Annie, volunteered to complete the task. And they were up to it! They gathered the numbers, ran over no mailboxes—they didn't even get called out on the community Facebook page for being suspicious (as has happened to us).



Paul and Annie Black—Super spies!

As for the numbers? Pretty good! Gardening was **up slightly** in River Ridge this season to 212 out of 356 households (**59.5%**). Last year, it was 205 households (**57.5%**). The nine-year average (2016-2024) is right there—59%. Consistent! That's what River Ridge is. Well, at least for the short-term.

If I go back to 2010 and look at the 15-year average, it's slightly lower at 57%.

For fun, I found the data going back all the way to 2004 and the first year of the full survey (2003 was really just a test run of just a few streets). That year, 70% of my neighbors gardened. By the end of the decade, it had dropped to 65%. Here are the averages by decade:

2004-2009	67%
2010-2019	61%
2020-2025	60%

Here's a spiffy chart showing the overall trend:



Downward, yes, since the beginning of this century, but we've known that. Note the dip in 2008 during the Great Recession, then the climb back up as folks discovered "staycations." As for the big dip in 2018, I chalked that up to weather, writing:

"Weather was admittedly tough in northern Illinois this season. April felt more like February, with a good snowstorm April 9. There were no opportunities to start gardening early. May opened nicely, but then turned cold and wet for Mother's Day Weekend (that Saturday was 53F). Two weeks later, the three-day Memorial Day Weekend turned into summer, with highs in the upper 90s, and nobody wants to garden in those conditions. The next two weekends it rained."

I also pointed out that the 7.5% dip sounded better when I said it was 20 fewer households.

And at least the decline has flattened a bit.

But back to 2025!

As I said, 59.5% of households gardened this season, up from the nine- and 15-year averages. I call that a win! As for how they chose to garden, here's that chart:

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	9-year avg.
Households that garden	59.5%	57.5%	61%	59%	65%	60%	58%	52.5%	58%	60%	59%
Hanging baskets	41	40	43	46	46	40	46	41	40	34	42
Containers	79	86	78	80	77	81	80	82	80	76	80
Plants in the ground	16	13	15.5	18	20	35.5	21	25.5	25	24	22
All three	4	3	4.5	4.8	4	5.5	9	9	8	6	6

The choice between hanging baskets and patio pots remains consistent across the years of the survey—roughly 80% of gardeners choose pots and about half that number choose baskets. Many—54 gardeners, or 25.5%, to be exact—choose both. Paul and Annie noted that a few folks went all out with their gardens, but others were pretty austere ... just one or two pots or baskets. They seemed dismayed, but I said it's not about quantity OR quality, it's about participation. And this is just the front yard and stoop; they might have gone crazy out back!

Gardening in the ground

When it comes to gardening the old-fashioned way, right in the ground, that's where River Ridge has changed the most. This season, 34 households, or 16% of gardeners, got out a trowel and dug in the earth. That's up from the last two years (13% and 15.5%), but well down from the nine-year average of 22% (also, note the first pandemic year of 2020, at 35.5%. Everybody went back to the land!).

If I go further back a decade, I see a high of 35% in 2011. And further back the number goes even higher—up to 49.5% in 2007 and 49% in 2006, the first year I have data. Either I've changed my way of counting or gardeners have gotten lazier. Or, as I prefer to speculate, growers and retailers are offering so much good instant gratification with their pots and baskets, there's less reason to dig flower beds.

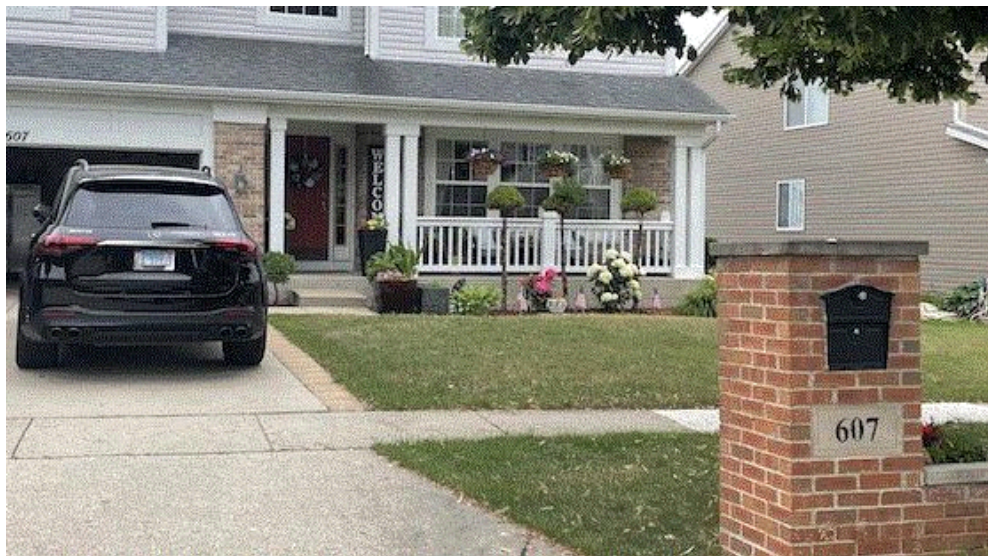
What's interesting is that container gardening has replaced flower beds for some gardeners. The average number of

gardeners growing in containers has climbed somewhat, as you can see from this line graph:



Note the two big dips at 2011 and 2015. They happen to coincide with high participation years (68% and 66%, respectively). I'm not sure why ... more people gardened those years, but they didn't do it the easy way, in pots. Nor did they increase basket use. I guess they just spread it across all categories.

The avid gardeners



All three. Note the annuals in the mailbox ... we count that as "in the ground" because they had to actually pop the plants out of the pot.

Lastly, my favorite category: All Three—meaning folks whose front garden had pots, baskets AND annuals right in the ground. This year, a very slight increase from 3% to 4%, representing a jump from six to nine households—a tiny fraction of the 212 that garden, I know. The nine-year average is 6%, the 15-year average is 7%. The highest I've seen is 14% in 2014 (I didn't capture that data before 2010).

The big decline happened in 2020, the first year of the pandemic when we dropped from 9% to 5.5%. We haven't recovered since. Don't know why that would reduce the number of avid gardeners ... perhaps they realized time is precious?

Got any guesses of your own? Let me know [HERE](#).

A River Ridge garden shop ...?

Here's something new in River Ridge: A pop-up driveway plant shop.



A River Ridge entrepreneur calling himself the “Garage Gardener Guy” has been selling plants out of his driveway at 420 S. Collins Street right around the corner from my old house. Paul and Annie photographed the racks and tables and shelves of plants. Facebook posts show he sold a lot of flowers and veggies starting in early April (but also had to close several days due to terrible weather).

I was curious if the pop-up influenced the homeowners nearby. But a quick check shows probably not: Of 22 homes on either side and across the street, 11 gardened and 11 fell into the “zip” category—no plants at all.


Which doesn’t surprise me, having spent 22 years in River Ridge trying to inspire my neighbors to garden (they mostly ignored my efforts except to humorously note how often I’d be out weeding at 6:00 a.m.).

Anyway, that’s a detailed look at gardening in River Ridge not only for 2025, but through the ages. **LET ME KNOW** your thoughts on the gardening habits you see among customers or neighbors.

And thanks again, Sun Gro Horticulture, for making this possible!

** Why don’t I start a Wedgefield Report? First, size. Wedgefield has 2,800 homes on 103 streets covering about 10*

square miles. Second, seasons. Even if I only surveyed a small section of the neighborhood in Florida it's almost impossible to tell if somebody has gardened "this season" ... which I put in quotes because the Florida gardening season is year-round, depending on what you want to plant.



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