

It's the Famous Fall River Ridge Report (20th Edition)

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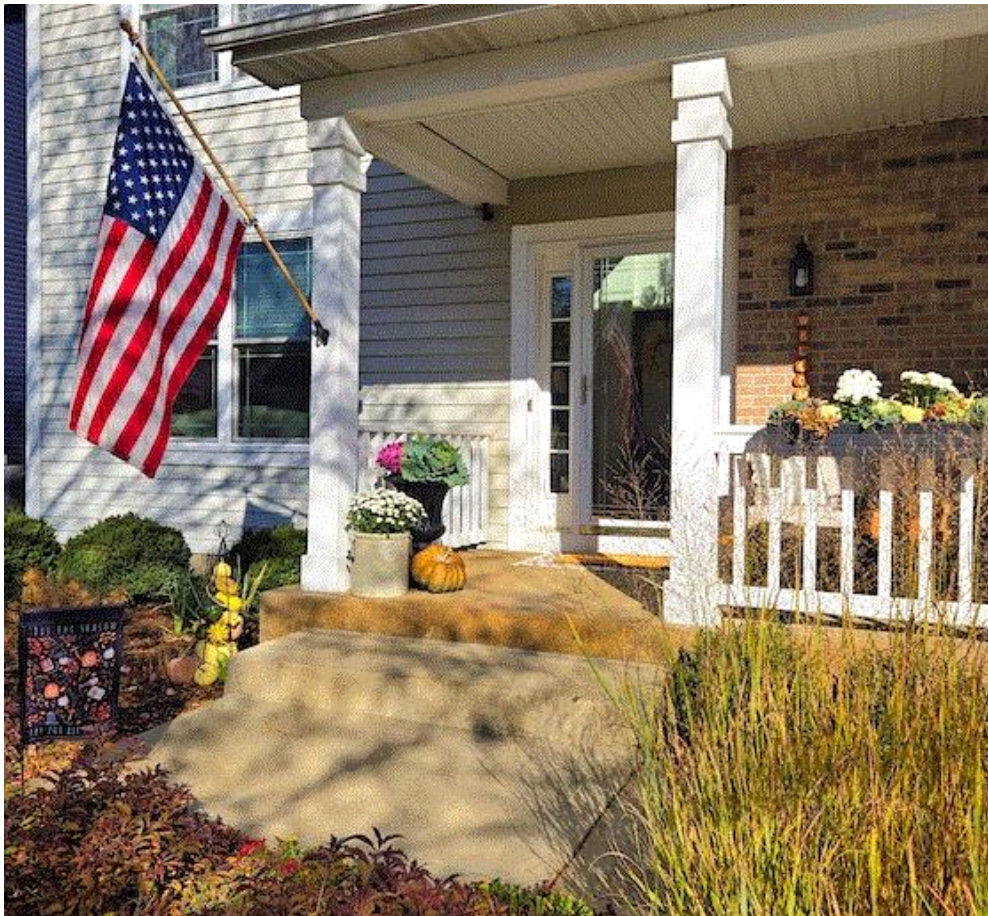
There's bad news, but there's good news, too!



Down, but up—That's the headline from the 2025 Fall River Ridge Report*, in which I survey my suburban Chicago neighborhood to discover the fall gardening and decorating propensities of its 356 households**. By the way, this is the 20th time we've conducted this report! The first was way back in 2006.

But, first, a word from our esteemed sponsor, **Sun Gro Horticulture**. Friends, if you're tired of substandard soils that sabotage your seedlings and stunt your stock, swing into action with Sun Gro's unbeatable peat moss and potting mixes, sustainably harvested from prime Canadian bogs where nature hoards her richest secrets! Trusted by growers from coast to coast, Sun Gro is the professional grower's companion. Accept no substitute—demand Sun Gro by name!

And now back to our regularly scheduled program ...



Tasteful front porch stylings of Sales Assistant Adriana Heikkila exhibiting all three main categories of decor.

First, the bad news

Fall gardening/decorating in River Ridge was down three percentage points this year, from 66% of households to **63%**. That's 12 fewer homes (out of 356) that showed signs of fall decorating and it's also the lowest fall participation figure I've seen in River Ridge since 2016.

Here's the chart:

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	10-year avg.
Homes that decorated	63%	66%	69%	75.5%	77.5%	66%	65%	67%	66.5%	63%	68%
Party poopers	37	34	31	24.5	22.5	34	35	33	34	37	32
Fall Flowers	43	42	34	36	35.5	34	34	34	23	30	35
Pumpkins, corn, etc	66	59	55	64	67	79	62	61	58	62	63
Plastic décor	71	79	83	75	78	79	77	76	75.5	71	76
All Three	24	22.5	19.5	24	21	19	18.5	15.5	14	16	19
Inflatables	9	9	9	13	7	7	8	6.5	7	6	8

As you can see, the 10-year average participation is 68%. Interestingly, though, fall participation had been on the decline and was stuck in the mid-60s. Until the pandemic, that is, and you see what happened in 2021 and 2022, with a major rebound. Folks wanted to get out, have fun and decorate! Now it would seem the novelty has worn off ... or perhaps the kids are getting older?

For comparison, here's 2010 through 2015:

2015	2014	2012	2011	2010
72%	65%	71%	71%	81%
28	35	29	30	19
20	26	31	31	23
68	80	61	49	65
70	63.5	75.5	77	80
12.5	14.5	16	11	15
5	4	5	6	8

Wondering if weather could have played a role in the decline, I checked the weather history for September and October learned that September was warmer than average, with some days peaking near 85F, well above the average of around 75F. The first week of October was even warmer, with highs between 84F and 90F. Whew! But then things cooled back to the normal range of 60s and 70s, so the heat may have dissuaded a few folks from getting out and decorating. And by the time it had cooled down to normal, they may have felt it was too late to bother.

Now for the good news

Of the 224 homes (63%) that did some sort of fall gardening/decorating, a larger percentage opted for our product—flowers—or real agricultural products—pumpkins, hay bales, corn stalks. Those categories were all up, while plastic décor (ghosts, ghouls, goblins, giant skeletons) was down. In fact, despite there being 12 fewer homes that decorated, *more* residents used agricultural products this year (148) than last year (139). And flower use was within three households (96 this year vs. 99 last year). That’s a positive sign!

Flower use popped up from 42% of decorators to 43%—a very slight increase, but the continuation of a trend and the highest figure by far in the survey’s history. The 10-year average is 32%. As expected, mums are far and away the most popular flower in River Ridge, with kale making a few appearances. And I think I spotted some viola pots in one photo. If you see anything else, chances are it’s been around since spring.



As mentioned, the use of **agricultural décor** like pumpkins is also up to **66%** from 59%. That’s not a record; in 2014, that figure hit 80%. And the pandemic year of 2020 was close at 79%. But this year’s figure is still above the 10-year average of 63% and indicates a positive trend: When plastic décor is so cheap, ubiquitous and easy to keep from season to season, folks still appreciate authenticity.



Not that **plastic décor** is going away. Yes, it hit its second-lowest score ever at 71%; only 2014's 63.5% and 2015's 70% were worse. But those who indulged in plastic décor have a wealth of over-the-top options, as a trip through the seasonal displays at Walmart, Home Depot, Lowe's and Menards will reveal. I'm freaked out by this clown appearing to peek out from under the garage door.



Unfortunately, however, one of the options is plastic flowers and they're getting more convincing. You can already buy plastic pumpkins, yet we saw the use of real pumpkins up, as well. So perhaps plastic flowers isn't the threat it might seem to be.



Pretty sure that's a plastic mum.

All three—way up!

All three is the category for the avid decorator who bought flowers, agricultural products AND plastic to make the biggest splash possible. At 24% of decorators, that figure is up 1.5 points from last year and ties the best year ever, 2022. The 10-year average is just 19% and the 15-year average is 17.5%, so you can see that there's an increase in the number of folks making the big effort.



While not in the chart (because I only started looking at this in the last few years), the **purists**—those who eschew plastic and use only real flowers and agricultural products—took a 2 percentage point jump to **6.5%** of participants, up from 4.5% last year. And the purest of the pure—those who only decorate with flowers—jumped 4 points, from 2.5% to 6.5%.



Almost a purist ... but being a purist myself, I have to point out what looks like a plastic wreath on the door.

Lastly, a sub-category of plastic—"air" as I call it on my survey form—meaning those fan-inflated figures that tend to only come out at night—which stayed at a consistent 9% of decorators. The 10-year average is 8%.



Well, that's it from River Ridge for yet another autumn! Yes, overall participation may be down a bit, but not an alarming amount. And on the plus side, almost as many folks decorated with flowers and MORE folks decorated with ag products, which bodes well for us!

Thanks again to our faithful sponsor, Sun Gro Horticulture, for putting the Gro in growing!

**River Ridge is a South Elgin, Illinois, subdivision located about 40 miles west of Chicago and consisting of 356 middleclass homes on 15 streets.*

***My former neighborhood. Also, the survey is now conducted by Publisher Paul Black and his wife, Annie. A special thanks to them for the survey and photos. Additional photos by Adriana Heikkila.*



See you next time in the regular Acres Online!

Chi

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