# The World-Famous Fall River Ridge Report!

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## It's River Ridge Report time again!




The leaves have turned, the temperature has dropped, the Bears have even won some football games … it must be time for the annual, world-famous, never-duplicated River Ridge Report, in which I survey the fall gardening and decorating habits of my neighborhood to see how much of our stuff they're purchasing. (I also do a Spring River Ridge Report, which you can find HERE.)

As they have for the past several years since I moved to Florida, my right-hand man Paul Black and his effervescent wife, Annie, drove their Honda Pilot around the 15 streets of River Ridge, counting mums, pumpkins, straw bales, ghosts, goblins and Harley-riding skeletons decorating the 356 homes of the middle-class neighborhood. This was the afternoon of October 30, 55F and overcast, with a slight drizzle—a typical fall day in Chicagoland.

But before we get into an analysis of the numbers they gathered, a quick word from our faithful sponsor, Sun Gro Horticulture. Friends, I know you're discerning about your peat moss and potting media, and Sun Gro delivers the quality, consistency and performance you expect. From seedling to finished plant, trust Sun Gro for the finest in growing media!

Now, on to the data ...



**Decorating: Back up!**

It's nice to start this report on somewhat of a high note: After declining three percentage points between 2024 and 2025, fall decorating in River Ridge is back up three points, to 66% of all households from 63% last year. That's nice, but it's two points below the 10-year average of 68%. Still, we'll take it!

Here's the 10-year chart listing the various types of fall decorating:

| | 2026 | 2025 | 2024 | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 | 2018 | 2017 | 10-year avg. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Homes that decorated | 66.0% | 63% | 66% | 69% | 75.5% | 77.5% | 66% | 65% | 67% | 67% | 68% |
| Party poopers (no décor at all) | 34 | 37 | 34 | 31 | 24.5 | 22.5 | 34 | 35 | 33 | 34 | 32 |
| Fall flowers | 32 | 43 | 42 | 34 | 36 | 35.5 | 34 | 34 | 34 | 23 | 35 |
| Pumkins, corn, etc. | 52 | 66 | 59 | 55 | 64 | 67 | 79 | 62 | 61 | 58 | 62 |
| Plastic décor | 73.5 | 71 | 79 | 83 | 75 | 78 | 79 | 77 | 76 | 75.5 | 76.5 |
| All three (the enthusiasts) | 12 | 24 | 22.5 | 19.5 | 24 | 21 | 19 | 18.5 | 15.5 | 14 | 19 |
| Flowers and Ag (the purists) | 7 | 6.5 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 4 | 5.5 | 5 | * | * | * | 4 |
| Inflatables | 13 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 13 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 6.5 | 7 | 9 |

Looking at the chart above, you can see that the pandemic years of 2021 and 2022 skewed the data upward—that was when everybody seemed to want to express themselves outdoors and in the garden. If I drop those two outliers, the average is exactly 66%.

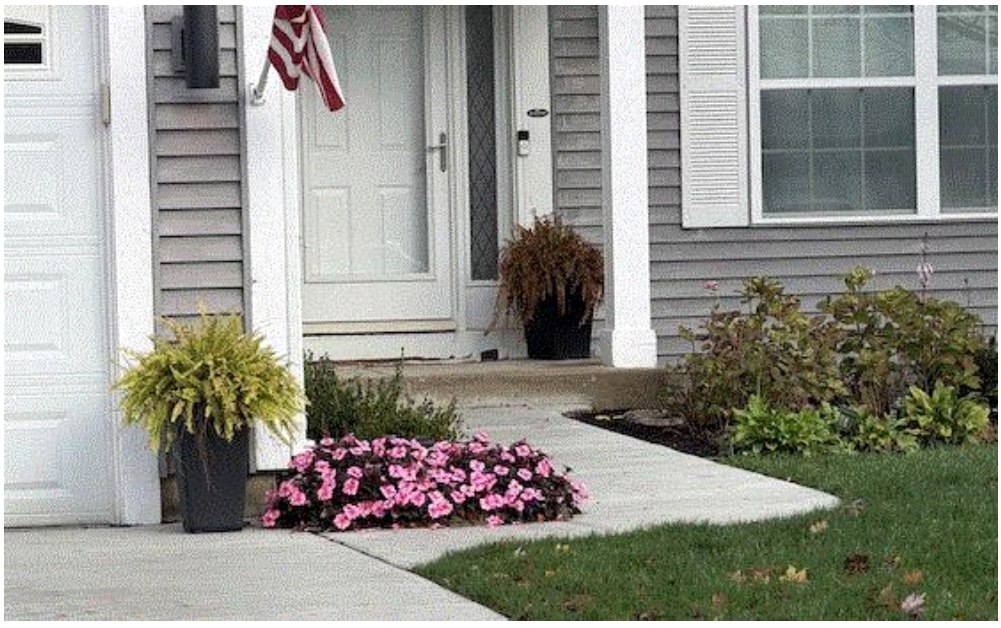
**Fall flowers: Fell**

This one I hate to have to report: Paul and Annie saw fall flowers at 20 fewer homes than last year, dropping flower consumption to 32% of decorating households, down from 43% last year. That's the lowest since 2017. It's not the lowest number ever—that would be 20% in 2015. But still, we want to see MORE mums and asters and kale and such, not less. The 10-year average is 35%.



But there could be an explanation. We editors have heard that the garden mum sales season was a bit soft this year at retail and some have told us it's because of the warm weather this fall.

"Why buy a mum when my geraniums still look good?" about sums up the situation. And that was the case in River Ridge—Paul and Annie noted SunPatiens, geraniums and cannas still looking beautiful. But, hey, those folks might still purchase a mum for Thanksgiving (provided they're available), so maybe it's not a decline in interest, just a timing issue.



**Why invest in fall flowers when the summer flowers still look good? Although that fern in the background is done ...**

Speaking of which, Paul and Annie didn't see much variety in fall flowers. They didn't count (perhaps we should), but 95% of them seemed to be mums. Very little variety in evidence. But there was one house that had marigolds and mums together—perfect!



**Pumpkins: Got carved up**

I will offer up the same warm-weather excuse for the 12-percentage-point drop in the purchase of agricultural commodities—pumpkins, straw bales and corn stalks—from 66% of decorating households down to 52%. That's the lowest number since I started doing this survey. The 10-year average is 62%.

Last year's 66% was quite a big jump from 2024's 59% and 2023's 55%, so again, maybe it's weather-related ...? You don't buy a pumpkin when it's 80F outside unless you want it to turn to mush. Perhaps River Ridge will see a late-season spending spree for Thanksgiving.

**Plastic décor: Up, but not much**

This category shouldn't be weather-related—unless it rains so much you can't get outside to put up the 12-ft. skeleton the kids talked you into. This year, plastic décor saw an increase of 2.5 points to 73.5% of decorating households, up from last year's 71%. The 10-year average is 76.5%.




**Plastic decor galore ... plus flowers and ag, so these fine folks fall into the enthusiasts category.**

Now, the one thing we can't quantify in this category is how MUCH plastic décor they installed. Did they cut back to just one plastic jack-o'-lantern and two plastic ghouls vs. last year's elaborate cemetery? No way to know. But this category has remained our most popular over the years and I suspect any changes revolve around parents or kids who

age out of the Halloween decoration phase of their lives.

**All three: A nosedive**

The enthusiasts—those who go all out for fall with all three categories, flowers, agricultural products and plastic—dropped drastically this year, to just 12% of decorators vs. 24% last year and a 10-year average of 19%. That's 29 households compared to 54 households last year. Pity, as that number had been holding around 20%, give or take since 2019. Before that, we did see some low numbers—14% in 2017, 12.5% in 2015, 14.5% in 2014—but it looked like we were on a nicer trend for a while. I'm not sure what to blame this on, beyond the slight declines in both flowers and ag products.




**This is what we like to see—plenty of everything!**

**The purists: The highest yet**

My personal favorite category because it's the one I was always in—no gaudy plastic or cheesy inflatables for me (although I do enjoy an inflatable Minion)—just pure, wholesome flowers and agricultural products. This year, the purists were 7% of the decorators in River Ridge—up from 6.5% last year and decently above the seven-year average of 4%.



What it tells me is that the folks who declined to buy flowers or pumpkins this year are the ones who also decorate with plastic items. But those who appreciate the traditional agrarian roots of a fall harvest display continued to express

themselves. Amen to that!

**Inflatables: Up and away!**

If I'm going to give credit to the purists for supporting their cause, then I have to be editorially honest and show the same consideration to those who express themselves through the display of pneumatically animated Halloween fauna (aka inflatables). That category jumped to 13% of decorators, up from 9% each of the last three years and tying the pandemic year of 2022. Who knows—maybe they're so ubiquitous now at the box stores—and clever and cheap—that folks are opting for them over mums and pumpkins?



Anyway, that's all the news that's fit to print from River Ridge for Fall 2026. Remember to support Sun Gro Horticulture. And if you see a pearl-white Honda Pilot driving through your neighborhood, don't call the cops! It's Paul and Annie, seeing if you're gardening or decorating.




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



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