



Questions from Deep in the Heart of Texas

Q Dear Boots,
Now that fall is finally here,
I'm ready to get decorating. What's
your feeling about pumpkins on the
porch? Carved? Not carved? How do
you feel about gourds? How much
decoration can I add without going
too far?

— From, Gramma Gourd

A Dear Gramma,
Here's a fun fact: For three
years I worked as an editor at a
home-and-lifestyle magazine.
During those years the amount of
time I spent thinking about all the
ways one might decorate a front
porch to signal the start of a season
can only be described with one word:
shocking.

In all the hours and hours *and*
hours I have spent reviewing front
porch fall arrangements, I amassed
a pile of knowledge about carved,
natural, pricy, posh, pristine, lumpy,
bumpy, ugly, glittery, sparkly, tie-
dyed and fake pumpkins.

Since leaving the magazine
world, I have had moments where
I've wondered what I will ever do
with all that knowledge. Short of
hanging around the aisles of Hobby
Lobby, hoping some fall-decor
shopper might suddenly strike up a
conversation, it seemed likely all I
learned would go to waste. Or worse,
be confirmed as a waste of brain
space I could have spent considering
urban crowding, or why homecoming
mums are now bigger than compact-
sized cars. Real world issues.


But your letter has saved me
from that fate, Gramma Gourd.
Because here's what you and I know:
a simply carved happy face can be
read as both friendly and too basic.

Going for an artful arrangement of
smooth, uncarved pumpkins says
sophisticated to some but trying
too hard to others. Yet skipping
pumpkins altogether and opting
for a shift to autumn foliage in the
planters might not be enough to get
noticed.

If the options for how to advertise
your fall feelings are endless ...
how the scarecrow does a person
determine the correct course?

Buckle your belt for the hayride,
Gramma Gourd, because we're about
to go off-road: You're going to have
to figure out what will give you great
joy every single time you walk up to
your front porch.

Forget the visitors and the
passersby and what your mother-in-
law said in 1987 when she thought
your skeleton decoration was "overt,
but if you like it ...". Contrary to what
the home-and-lifestyle industry
wants us to believe, whether our
front porches are on or off trend has



absolutely nothing to do with who we are. I've seen beautiful, impeccable, artful and beautiful arrangements created by people filled with misery. And I've seen the cheesiest, tackiest, most over-the-top gatherings of autumn paraphernalia you can fathom put together by people who bubbled with so much life that you wanted to scooch a little closer to them just to see if you could catch a bit of their natural high.

So Gramma, I say carve if you want. Spend way too much on a set of sparkly pink pumpkins if you dare. Skip decorating and celebrate fall by lighting a candle, cranking up the AC and pulling out your sweaters too early. Whatever you do, just don't think twice about what anyone else may say. Chances are good they'll have one word about your cavalier style: shocking. But if they are smart, they'll recognize they've just encountered someone who is worth following in the real world.

— *Love, Boots*

Q Dear Boots,
One of my good friends just transferred her kids to a high school that is our rival.

I never thought it would affect our friendship, but now that the first football game showdown is approaching things have gotten weird. Got any advice?

— *From, Varsity Blues*

A Dear Blues,
Just the other day I was saying it sure will be nice to get to a place where you can go the whole fall semester without any football drama. I was thinking of a place like an empty nest, or if that's hoping for too much, maybe the hereafter. Without missing a beat, the parent next to me in the bleachers said, "You mean a place like Vermont?"

But even if we were planted in a place that didn't do football

drama, it would still have relationship weirdness — that's life, not geography. A sure indicator of how much a relationship matters to us is equal to how far we will walk out on a limb to make that weirdness go away.

If you prefer to stay close to the tree trunk, dressed in your team colors, safely huddled with your mom friends who have not defected to enemy territory, then remember that football is but a season. It too, shall pass. Maybe weird today will be forgotten after a few tomorrows.

However, if the weirdness has made you realize the value of this person in your life, then it might be time to start tiptoeing out into vulnerable territory. Pick up the phone. Call your friend. Attempt to talk things out. If it works, the friendship is saved. If it doesn't, you will end up out there alone — but you will have gained a much more important truth.

It's easy to get distracted into believing sport is only for the people running on the field. But really it's out there on the limbs of life — hearts pounding, selves exposed — where we know we are in the game too.

— *Love, Boots*
