

Tips for Showing Vegetables, Flowers and Domestic Exhibits.

GENERAL

Read the class schedule and "Rules for competitors" carefully.

Where a quantity or measurement is specified, make sure you comply.

VEGETABLE and FRUIT Classes

It should be noted that the following tips and suggestions are what most competent judges will be looking for in the perfect exhibit, but at the end of the day judging is largely an inexact science and judges may have personal likes and dislikes. If however you are able to follow these tips you should stand a better chance of being among the prizes. Showing vegetables should however be enjoyable, not a chore, and the purpose of these tips is to help those exhibitors who want to know more and not to discourage entries. The maxim is - the more entries the better the show!!

- Where the Schedule says "as grown" Vegetable roots should be carefully washed with a soft sponge but vegetables should NOT be trimmed.
- Where the Schedule does NOT say "as grown" Vegetables should be cleaned and trimmed of roots and leaves as described in the class.
- Collection boxes – make a "tray" to measurements shown and show off the best from your vegetable garden.

If any exhibitors wish to have even more information on what is required for individual exhibits the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) publishes "The Horticultural Show Handbook" which gives more detailed information and criteria on showing flowers, fruit and vegetables. The book can be purchased from the RHS.

Potatoes.

Potatoes should be as far as possible of the same shape and size, with eyes that are shallow. They ought to be carefully washed so as not to damage the skins, but with all traces of earth removed. The exhibit will be marked down if they are misshaped, damaged by slugs, worm or blight. The presence of green colouring as a result of exposure to light is also defective.

Carrots.

When taken from the soil one should be careful to try and maintain a long tap root. This can be achieved by watering them well and easing them from the soil. The carrots should be carefully washed with a soft cloth to ensure they are free of earth especially around the top of the shoulders. The skins should be undamaged and they should be of similar size and shape - try to keep a long tap root. The leaf stalks should be cut to a length of about 75mm and neatly tied with raffia. They will be marked down if they display damage by carrot root fly grubs and green colouring around the shoulders due to exposure to light.

Lettuce. (check variety)

Lettuce that looks fresh and clean on the day of the show will do well for you. Pull it carefully and don't turn it upside down until you have wrapped the root ball in a plastic bag. Wash the roots, trim off the minimum of damaged outer leaves and put the roots, wrapped in wet kitchen roll, back in a plastic bag. Leave the lettuce roots in the bag until the last possible minute to keep the leaves crisp and fresh. You could even give the head a spray with water. Lettuce can be picked the previous evening, be prepared and keep in a bucket of cold water somewhere cool until you take to the show. Lettuces, shown with root, may be displayed in a glass of water on the table to keep them fresh.

Onions.

Onions should be uniform in shape and size. Be careful to ensure that they conform to any weight restrictions. The onions should be well ripened, firm and with a dry,

unbroken, unblemished and ripe skin. The onions should not be over skinned and green. The roots should be trimmed neatly and the top of the onion (the neck), which ought to be thin, should be turned over and bound neatly with raffia or elastic bands. The onions should be staged on rings or sand so that they sit upright on the show bench. (One can use cardboard tubes from used kitchen roll etc. cut to size)

Runner Beans.

The beans should be exhibited with some stalk (the handle) attached. They should be straight and of equal length and uniform size. They should also be fresh and not coarse and stringy. The seeds should not be overly prominent in the pod (the judge will snap one of your beans when judging to check that they are fresh and not stringy). They should be of a good even colour and free from blemishes.

Beans, other than Runner.

Again, leave the stem on the bean. So long as they match, it's worth putting anything in this class

Pea Pods

Choose pods that are similar in size and cut from the plant with scissors. Leave the stems long and of a similar length. On the day, arrange the pods in a row on a paper plate.

Tomatoes.

The tomatoes should be regular in shape and size and firm but fully ripe (showing the true colour of the variety). They should be unblemished but not be polished and have a fresh green calyx attached.

Cabbage.

The Cabbage (s) should be of a good size and colour and have a firm solid heart. The leaves as far as possible should be clean and free from slug and caterpillar damage. Make sure there are no slugs or grubs lurking in the foliage. Try to maintain the "waxy bloom" on the leaves which will disappear with excessive washing and handling. The roots should be cut off as can some of the outer leaves (if damaged), but not all, leaving a neat stalk of some 75mm. The cabbage (s) should be fresh. If two are being exhibited they should also be uniform in shape and size.

Beetroot.

When taken from the soil one should be careful to try and maintain a long tap root. This can be achieved by watering them well and easing them from the soil. Carefully trim any side roots from the main tap root leaving just one root. The beetroot should be carefully washed with a soft cloth to ensure they are free of earth. The skins should be undamaged and they should be of similar size and shape, as a rule of thumb the ideal size for globe beetroot is that of a tennis ball. The leaf stalks should be cut to a length of about 75mm and neatly tied with raffia. If they are too large and woody they will be marked down. Rubbing them with cooking oil whilst enhancing their appearance is also considered defective.

Courgettes.

Courgettes should be fresh of between 4 to 6 inches in length and of uniform shape and size whilst displaying a good all over skin colour without blemishes. The flowers can be left attached but if they fall off, leave on the plate. Do not cut the courgettes too close to the fruit as they should have about 2cms of stalk attached. They should be clean without the need for washing which can be detrimental to their natural appearance. In case or round cultivars they should be around 3.5 to 4 inches in diameter.

Marrow.

Marrows should adhere to size limits and display an even and all over good colour. They should be displayed with at least 2cms of stalk attached. The skin should ideally be unblemished.

Cucumber.

The Cucumber should be exhibited with about 2cms of stalk attached and with the dead flower intact and still attached at the end of the cucumber. The cucumber should be fresh, straight and not over mature. They should have a short "handle" i.e. the thin end to which the stalk is attached. They should be blemish free and retain their natural bloom. Care needs to be exercised when handling them as this can remove the bloom as may washing.

Sweetcorn.

They should be fresh and ripe but not over ripe and starchy. The ears of corn should be even, regular (in line) and fully formed over the whole of the cob. They should be exhibited with at least 2 cms of stalk attached and with the protective leaves (the husk) and dead filaments present. To present the cobs the outer leaves on one side only should be neatly peeled back and tucked under the cob to display a section of the ears of corn.

Shallots.

Shallots should be prepared for exhibition in much the same way as onions. They should however be presented neatly on a plate of clean dry sand.

Spring Onions.

Just get a matching bunch without too much bulbing at the base.

Parsnips.

The tips for exhibiting parsnips are much the same as those above for carrots. Specimens should be well washed and without blemishes if possible. Some varieties of parsnips are very susceptible to canker which is most unsightly on the show bench, so when purchasing seed it is worth seeking out varieties that show resistance to canker.

Leeks.

Leeks should be thoroughly washed with the soil teased from the roots which should not be cut off. The flags (leaves) should also not be cut and in good condition. The barrel of the leak should be straight, even and not swollen (bulbous) at the base. The longer the blanched (white) part of the barrel the better. The leeks should be uniform in shape and size. It is advisable to tie the flags loosely with strands of raffia in two or three places along their length.

Any Other Vegetable

This doesn't have to be that unusual, just show something that isn't in the rest of the schedule. If you grow something that's not elsewhere in the schedule, put it in. Suggestions: Globe Artichoke, Aubergine, Garlic, Tomatillo, Dandelion, Kohl Rabi, Squash, Pumpkin, Melon, Okra, Sweet Pepper. Hot Pepper, Radish, Turnip.

Plate of soft fruit.

Just select the soft fruit at their peak of perfection, crop them and leave on a bit of the stem. Arrange them around a plate and hope for the best. Try raspberry, blackberry, strawberry, currants, gooseberry, loganberry, or any fruit with a soft texture and numerous seeds will be acceptable.

FLOWER and PLANT Classes

Select flowers in good fresh "condition", i.e. in the most perfect stage of its possible beauty and free from damage due to weather, pests and diseases. Where possible choose vases to suit the height of the stems.

Flowers should be displayed in a plain container (vase) having a greater height than the width measurement of its mouth. No account is taken of the container when judging the material shown in it. Where the Schedule mentions 'POT' or 'BOWL' please note A Pot is higher than it is wide. A Bowl is wider than it is high.

Dahlia

Select clean blooms with florets intact, firm and free from blemish. Stem should be straight and proportionate to the size of the bloom and the bloom held at an angle of not less than 45 degrees to the stem. Stage with blooms all facing in the same direction, not touching and with balanced effect. Retain some foliage on the stems if possible.

Gladioli

Select straight, well balanced spikes still carrying bottom floret. Ideally one third in full flower, one third with buds in colour, and one third in green bud. Remove secondary spikes

Roses

Select blooms with a well-formed centre, free from blemished and with strong stems and healthy leaves.

Sweet Peas

Select strong spikes with well-spaced blooms, each one fully open and fresh large flowers with erect standards, rigid wings and keel closed, free from colour-running, spotting or scorching and of a bright colour with a silken sheen. Long, straight stems in proportion to the size of the blooms.

Culinary Herbs

Variety is normally favoured.

DOMESTIC Classes

Careful attention should be paid to the instructions/recipes – particularly tin sizes. Cakes etc should be covered in cling film.

Baking

Items should be exhibited on a white plate. The majority of marks are awarded for flavour/aroma, but the internal condition and overall appearance are also taken into account. Slide a folded length of greaseproof paper under a cake, to place it in and remove it from the container you are using to take it to the show.

Cakes should be well risen, even in shape and baking. Any Fruit should be evenly distributed throughout the cake. A domed top with slight cracking is acceptable for light fruit cakes. The cake should not bear any cooling rack marks.

Pastry

Quiche the filling is cooked with the pastry.

Flan pastry cooked separately.

Scones

Savoury scones should always be prepared using a plain cutter, a fluted cutter may be used for plain, sweet or fruit scones. Diameter should equal the height (in the ideal world).

Victoria sponge

The top and bottom should be the same depth.

Preserves

Use clear jars free from commercial trademarks. All preserves should be labelled with small labels stating the main fruit or vegetable used together with the day, month and year of making.

Jams, Jellies and Marmalades. - The jar should be filled to the brim to allow for shrinkage. For the top of the jar use a well-fitting wax disc and cellophane.

Marmalades should be based on citrus fruits.

Lemon Curd. - For the top of the jar use a well-fitting wax disc and cellophane.

Chutney. - There should be a ½ inch head space between the contents and the lid and the jar must be topped with a vinegar proof lid, i.e. a plastic lined twist lid. The chutney must be a minimum of six months old.

Eggs

They should be displayed on a paper plate.

CRAFT and CHILDREN's classes

Many of the classes have various forms of measurement and these need to be adhered to which may mean for example trimming that photo.