

TAKING PART IN THE ANNUAL SHOW: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW!

Please read this: it's a lot of information, but it should answer nearly all your questions!

Entry forms and fees: the deadline for submitting entry forms (or notifying the Show Secretary of which classes you are entering) is Wednesday 28th August. You can put the form and entry money in the post or through my letterbox, or give me the details by phone/email and pay the entry fees (cash only, sorry) on the day; my address and contact details are on the front of the Schedule. Entry fees are 20p per class (10p for the Children's Section), or 40p for late entries up to midnight on the day before the Show. Apart from the Children's classes, which are open to anyone below the age of 17, you need to be a paid-up member to enter, so if you haven't paid your subscription for 2024-25, please include £8 (£12 for a couple) for that.

Before you send your entry form in, double-check that you have ticked the correct boxes and make a note for your own use of which classes you have entered. Our policy is not to accept new entries, or changes to existing ones, on the day of the Show; I am often lenient about this, but frankly it depends on our having space for unexpected entries, and it involves extra paperwork that we can do without on what is already a fraught day, and I reserve the right to refuse you. We **are charging £1 each** for on-the-day entries, if we accept them. (It doesn't matter if you enter a class and subsequently decide you don't have an exhibit for it; we get several such entries every year, including some of mine!) I suggest you tick off the relevant classes in your copy of the Schedule, and bring it to the Show on the day so that you can quickly and easily match up your exhibits with the correct class numbers (your exhibitor's cards will only have the class numbers on them), although copies of the Schedule will be available if you forget.

In preparation: PLEASE READ THE SCHEDULE CAREFULLY! Most of the questions that exhibitors ask, or get wrong, are covered in there. If there's anything that you can't find the answer to, please ask me. And please **read it all again** before you bring your exhibits to the Show so that you know what to expect. There will be stewards on hand in the hall to show you what to do once you're there. Make a note of what you need to bring to the Show, for example how many of each type of fruit, vegetables or flowers, and whether you will need vases or plates ('a plate of ...' means exactly that, and you have to provide the plate). You will be able to get water from the hall kitchen, but you have to bring everything else yourself.

On the day: Birdlip Village Hall will be open from 8.30am for the staging of exhibits; you must have completed this and be out of the hall by 10.30am, when judging begins. I and the stewards will be available to guide you, although exhibitors or their representatives should actually stage the exhibit themselves. It's ok to ask someone to bring your exhibit to the Show if you can't be there yourself (but make sure they're available to take it away again at the end of the day!).

Section A (Fruit & Veg): Produce should be clean, but not scrubbed; keep the natural bloom on it. You can remove any very untidy outer layers of skin from onions and shallots, but leave most of the outer layers on; they are usually displayed standing in a dish of sand, or on rings (exhibitors often use wooden napkin rings for onions – or polo mints for shallots!), with hairy roots trimmed and tops neatly trimmed and tied. Root vegetables should have the leaves trimmed to about 75mm (if your carrots have 'hairs' on the sides you can remove them by soaking them in water for a few hours). Fruit, including soft fruit, and tomatoes should be presented with a short stub of stem attached, so cut or break them from the plant rather than pulling. It's fine for the contents in your 'tray of vegetable' classes to spill over the sides of the tray if they're too big to sit fully within it; arrange the vegetables so that they are all visible, and note what the Schedule says about quantities of each vegetable. For other classes it's

best to put the produce on a plate (a paper one is fine), except for the stone fruit which should be placed upright in a dish. For the best-tasting tomato class and the herbs class, place a slip of paper with the tomato variety name/names of the herbs alongside your exhibit; in the case of the tomatoes, this is so that other gardeners can see which varieties taste best. For the herbs, presentation is key; there should be four varieties, but you can have multiple sprigs of each herb. For the 'Any other fruit/veg' classes, we have added some guidance on preferred quantities to be displayed; ask me if you're unsure.

Section B (Flowers): If you have a number of exhibits in vases, it can be helpful to bring a bottle or similar container from which you can part-fill the vases with water; this will save you running back and forward to the kitchen for water! (and part-filling the vases will minimise the risk of spillages.) Watch out for damaged leaves or flowers, and remove them. It's a difficult time of year for roses; keep yours deadheaded for the best chance of having flowers on the day, and if they peak too early, cut them a few days ahead and put them, vase, water and all, in the fridge (they do it for Chelsea ...). Likewise an unopened bud might open if you cut it and put the vase in a sunny, warm place for a few days. You can persuade a partly-opened rose to open fully by cupping the bloom in your hand and blowing gently into the centre of the flower. For class 20, remember to bring a slip of paper with the rose variety name on it (don't know the variety? – invent one and see if the judge notices!). For all the rose classes, watch out for unwanted extra buds (see the Tips and Hints at the end of the Schedule) – you must have the exact number of stems and blooms, or your entry may be disqualified. For the pot plant classes, remember to display only the pot in which the plant is growing, not the outer pot; this allows the judge to see how well the plant has been grown.

Section C (Flower arrangements): Only fresh plant material may be used, not dried or artificial, and it doesn't have to be grown by you. Exhibits **MUST NOT** exceed the dimensions given for each class, including the container, and in the miniature class, the flowers should be in proportion to the arrangement, ie very small indeed. As with the Flowers exhibits, watch out for damaged material and remove it.

Section D (Cakes and Preserves): All exhibits will be opened and tasted. As with the flower arrangements, this section is not a test of your gardening skills; you may use bought fruit etc if you like. Check that contents of jars have not shrunk, that there is no mould, and that all traces of old labels, sticky patches or clouding have been cleaned off the jars (use white spirit or WD40); all jars should be labelled with variety, and month/year of making. Do your baking the day before the Show (except for the gingerbread, which is best made a few days ahead); warm baking in a hot hall is not good for hygiene, and cutting into it while it's still warm damages the texture and makes it difficult to judge. Baked exhibits should be presented on a plate, and the quiche should be removed from its tin so that the pastry base can be judged; the quiche should be vegetarian (not necessarily vegan; we just don't want meat sitting out in a warm hall, so no bacon or ham). The best way to get both halves of your Victoria sponge the same size is to use two identical tins and, before baking, to check that they and their contents weigh the same. Your cheese scones will benefit from a little mustard powder in the mix.

Section F (Crafts): Don't forget to provide a slip of paper stating how much of the exhibit is your own work, except where this is obvious. There's nothing at all wrong with using professional design, mounting or finishing services, nor with decorating a bought item, but the judges would like to give credit to those who do the design or finishing for themselves or make the decorated item.

Frances Ellery
Show Secretary