

Tips for Showing Vegetables, Flowers, and Cookery Exhibits.

If you follow these tips, you should stand a better chance of being among the prize cards. Showing 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!! The key consideration for all exhibitors is to **READ AND UNDERSTAND THE SCHEDULE**. In particular, make sure that you have the correct number of items exhibited. If the Schedule calls for eight runner beans make sure that you have displayed eight. Seven or nine on the plate may give you a NAS, Not According to Schedule. Also make sure that if you enter an exhibit into a class where the Schedule states “not included in any other Class” double check that there is not already a class for the item that you wish to exhibit. Judges often have to NAS an exhibit if it does not comply with size or weight requirements. A classic example is pot size in floral classes, if the Schedule states “pot not exceeding 20cm” make sure that it is 20cm or under. The maxim is to Read, Read and Read Again the Schedule. If any exhibitors wish to have more information on what is required for individual exhibits an excellent publication is the RHS “The Horticultural Show Handbook”, which gives more detailed information and criteria on showing flowers, fruit and vegetables and can be purchased from RHS Publication

General guidelines

Look for perfect specimens

Judges are looking for vegetables, fruit, or flowers that are in excellent condition, and as near perfect as possible, even if it is not the largest specimen you have. This means no damage, no signs of disease and nice even growth. Exhibits should be free from any defect such as disease, insect infestation and damage, for example from garden tools.

Uniformity in size is more important than impressive size unless the class calls for ‘largest’ or ‘heaviest’. Fruits and vegetables should be ripe for eating – do not choose under ripe or over ripe specimens.

Harvest your entries with great care

The day before the Show, carefully harvest your crops. The only exception to this is shallots and onions which may be harvested and set out to dry out a little, a few days earlier. Gently wash away all soil on entries which have been in contact with the ground. Try to avoid dropping or bruising any entry. Remove any pests you find.

With leafy vegetable entries, you must leave all leaves in place, do not be tempted to remove the outer ones. With root vegetables, leave enough stalks on them. If there are multiple items in the class (e.g. 5 tomatoes), make sure that they are roughly the same size and match as much as possible – this applies to flowers, fruit and vegetables, and of **one variety/cultivar only** (unless the class calls for more than one).

Stage your entries in accordance with the judge’s expectations

Make sure you present your entry in the best way. For example, root vegetables are expected to be shown with 75mm of stalk showing; if you don’t, you may lose points. See the tips for each type below.

For flower stems and herbs, do not forget to put them in water when you stage them. You may label the exhibit with its name; this is not compulsory, except for the collection of herbs class. Arrive in good time to set out your entries.

Tips on Showing Vegetables

Stage as attractively as possible on dishes, plates or directly on the table in a 'wheel' formation e.g. peas; in a row, e.g. runner beans; or in a fan, e.g. carrots. Align stalks towards the back of the table.

Be aware that certain root vegetables may be cut by the judge.

Beans (Broad, French and Runner)

Cut all pods from the vine using scissors and ensure each pod has a portion of stalk. Stage on a dish or plate or directly on the bench; stalks at one end.

In the class for French beans, a climbing or dwarf variety can be exhibited. Judges will determine freshness by snapping or opening a pod.

Beans for showing should all be of the same length and width (as near as possible). A couple of weeks or so before the Show look at your beans still growing and any bean less than four inches, which you think may be ready for the day of the Show, squeeze gently where the seed is so as to break the seed and it will not swell or bulge out and spoil your exhibit.

Beetroot

All beetroot should be firm, fresh, and clean with a single root (if possible). Select roots of even size: for globe beetroot, between 60 and 75mm, for long beetroot as for parsnips; and for cylindrical, roots approx. 150mm in length. Small side roots should be removed. Take care in washing as all marks will show up clearly after a few hours. Cut the foliage to approximately 75mm, tie the remaining foliage for neatness (but not essential).

The judge will cut one beet from each exhibit to see if there are any prominent white rings.

Cabbages

Clean, solid heads of equal size, with a good waxy bloom and free of pest damage. Remove a minimum of outer discoloured leaves. Stage with approx. 50mm of stalk remaining, heads towards the front.

Carrots

Firm, blemish-free specimens of good colour and uniformity without discolouration at the top.

Long pointed: Should be fresh, firm and long with smooth roots, good colour all down the length of the root. Foliage trimmed to approximately 75mm in length.

Stump rooted: Fresh, of good colour and shape with a distinct stump showing, clear smooth skin and foliage trimmed to approximately 75mm in length.

Cauliflowers, calabrese & broccoli

Stage with approx. 75mm of stalk remaining. Just prior to staging trim back leaves to match the level of the outside of the curd.

Courgettes

Should be young, tender fruits of good shape (straight if possible) and colour approximately six inches (150mm) in length and one and a half inches (35mm) in diameter, or in the case of round cultivars approx. 75mm in diameter. May be shown with or without their flower.

Cucumber

Fresh, young, green, tender, blemish free, straight fruits of uniform thickness and short stalks, can be shown with or without flowers attached.

Fennel

Large, clean bulbs with fleshy swollen leaf base, free from coarseness or visible flower stems. Foliage trimmed back to app. 75-100mm, but with central young foliage retained.

Garlic

Well-shaped, solid, clean well ripened bulbs with thin necks, dried stem of app. 25mm. Roots should be removed.

Lettuce

Lift with roots intact in evening or early morning. Fresh uniform heads of attractive colour are essential. Roots should be washed, wrapped in moist tissue, inserted in a plastic bag and neatly tied. Remove only markedly damaged outer leaves and stage on the show bench with heads facing the front.

Marrows

Tender, young, uniform fruits are most desirable, which should be less than 350mm long and 500mm in circumference. Wipe clean and stage directly on the show bench

Onions

Avoid soft, stained specimens with thick, immature necks. Do not over skin. Unless specified otherwise, the tops should be tied or whipped using plain raffia and the roots neatly trimmed back to the basal plate. Onions are often staged on rings or soft collars.

Onions, green salad

Plants should be staged with foliage and roots attached and well washed.

Parsnips

Should be straight and of good length, evenly tapered and well developed. Great care should be taken lifting the roots, as bruising by fingers and scratching by soil particles will show later. Water well before lifting, wash carefully and cut off foliage to approx. 75mm. if shown as a pair, they should be of equal in size, shape and colour.

Peas

The pods should be uniform in length and in good condition, preferably, large, long and smooth. Judges will open and check pods during their examination. Cut pods from the vine with scissors, retaining 25mm of stalk and handle by this stalk to retain the natural bloom. Holding pods up to a strong light will detect internal damage and reveal the number of peas.

Peppers, sweet and hot (chilli)

The exhibit should be fresh and uniform in colour and well developed with stalks attached.

Potatoes

Select medium-sized specimens, generally between 200g and 250g; as a guide each potato should be of a size to just cover the palm of your hand. Select equally matched tubers with shallow eyes and free from skin blemishes. Wash carefully with a soft sponge in clean water. Should look a fresh colour. Stage on a dish or plate with 'rose end' pointing outwards.

Radishes

Fresh, firm, medium-sized, young, tender and brightly coloured specimens. Trim foliage to approx. 30mm.

Rhubarb

Trim top foliage off leaving approx. 75mm from start of leaf stalks. Wipe stalks clean and trim off any bud scales at the bottom.

Shallots

Should be shown as separate bulbs on dry sand. Top and roots should be trimmed. Bulbs must not exceed 30mm in diameter.

Summer Squash

Young, fresh, shapely fruits of any colour but well matched.

Sweetcorn

Fresh cylindrical cobs of uniform size with fresh green husks and intact silks. They should be displayed with approximately one quarter of the grain exposed by pulling down sharply from the tip to the base and neatly tucked husks under the cob. The stalks should be trimmed.

Tomatoes

Small fruited: Should be fresh, ripe but firm, well coloured and blemish free with fresh calyx (or stalk) still attached. Each tomato should be no larger than 35mm in diameter.

Medium fruited: Should be of good shape, well rounded or plum, clear skinned, ripe but firm. Size about 60mm in diameter or near as possible all fruits should match as near as possible.

Large fruited: Not less than 75mm in diameter. Shapely, ripe but firm, well coloured with fresh calyces attached.

Stage on a plate or dish, with the calyx intact and uppermost. A small amount of sand on the plate can help to settle the fruit upright.

Turnips and Swedes

Solid, shapely roots with small tap root and no side shoots.

Herbs, culinary

Fresh healthy, clean, blemish free with a list of herbs, the foliage is the predominate factor, preferably not in flower.

Tips on Showing Fruit

General tips

All fruit should be fresh and clean, not polished, shown with stalks attached where specified.

The specimens composing an entry should be uniform in size, form and colour, of **one variety/cultivar only** and all with stalks intact. Handle all fruits as little as possible and by their stalks where possible to preserve the natural bloom. Use scissors rather than fingers to pick soft fruits. Pick more than necessary so that reserves are available when staging. Where possible specimens should be arranged on a dish or plate. Judges may cut fruit.

Apples and Pears

Shapely fruits with undamaged eyes and stalks intact and clear unblemished skin. Should not be polished and should be staged with stalk end downwards.

Berries

Large, ripe fruit of good colour, they are best exhibited placed in lines so they can be easily counted. Stalks and calyces should be fresh and all point one way.

Currants

The strigs should be intact and laid roughly parallel, the bottom of the strigs to the front of the plate. The berries should be large, ripe and uniform on fresh stalks, own plant foliage can be used.

Grapes

Should be shown as a complete bunch with a piece of lateral shoot on either side of the stalk to form a T-handle.

Jostaberries, Worcesterberries and Blueberries

Should be laid roughly parallel where possible, mound the fruit in the centre.

Melons

Large fruit for the cultivar, clean, shapely, free from blemishes, with about 50mm of stalk to form a T handle.

Quinces and figs

Are best arranged around perimeter of the plate with the stalks facing towards the centre. Figs with signs of splitting can be exhibited as this is a sign of ripeness.

Plums, cherries and similar shaped fruits

Are best laid out in lines across the plate. The bloom should not be disturbed and stalks should be intact. Gages with signs of slight shrivelling can be exhibited as this is a sign of ripeness.

Tips on Showing Flowers

Floral Arrangements

Floral exhibits are judged on condition, uniformity and attractiveness of presentation. Material should be fresh and free from damage and disease, leaves as well as blooms. The specimens in an exhibit should be alike in age, size and form. They should be arranged to display their merits to the best advantage.

Any type of flowers grown from seed in the last twelve months can be exhibited in the appropriate classes; this includes perennials.

Material for a show is best cut in the evening or early morning when flowers and foliage are cool. The cut stems should be stood in deep water. It is advantageous to leave them overnight in a cool position from which light is mostly excluded to prevent the stems curving towards light. Exhibits are judged on their appearance at the time of judging.

Make sure you interpret the title of the class you are entering and use appropriate plant material for that class. Keep within the measurements allowed.

The Horticultural Show Handbook from the RHS advises: *“Beauty of form and colour, lightness of arrangement, happy harmonies or suitable contrasts always meet with general approval. The use of suitable foliage, berries, fruits and seed pods, and accessories may be desirable and permitted or required by the schedule.”*

Mixed Flowers and other Cut Flower Classes

Choose exhibits that are in good condition, that is, when they are at their most perfect and all parts are fresh and free from damage due to weather, pests, diseases, careless handling, etc.

Standard show vases in a choice of sizes are provided for the staging of cut flower and foliage exhibits to make the exhibits anonymous.

In vases of one kind of flower, choose exhibits that are the most uniform, such as the most alike in age, size and form.

Dahlias

Blooms should be fresh and clean (no earwigs or thrips), firm and not marked. Stems and foliage are taken into account by the Judge, especially if there is close competition, therefore stems should be straight. Be sure to nip out any immature flower buds in the leaf joint as these count as a bloom and could lead to disqualification.

Fuchsia Blooms

Flowers which are fully open and compete with all flower parts. All flower parts except the anthers should be free of pollen. The stigma should be fresh. The anthers should be at the stage of development where pollen is about to appear or has just appeared

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 any secondary spikes.

Roses

Hybrid Tea blooms should be shown at half to three-quarter open stage without the middle of the flower wide open showing the stamens. Cluster or floribunda stems should be shown fresh and the stamens, if visible, should not be black and stale. A week or so prior to the Show take out the centre bud or flower from the head of the cluster and more flowers will open fresh for the Show.

Sweet Peas

Strong spikes of large, well-shaped, fully open blooms. Long straight stems in proportion to the size of the blooms.

Vases of Cut Flowers

Should be exactly that, a vase of cut flowers. If you include extra foliage (other than the foliage on the actual flower stalks) you are likely to be disqualified. Select nice fresh flowers at their optimum of perfection and display in the vase to give a nicely balanced effect that is pleasant to view from all sides. Colour co-ordinated displays will often win the day against a vase of clashing colours. A vase of several different flower types will also be judged more favourably than a vase showing only one or two types.

Pot plants

The exhibit should be large for the particular type of plant, well-balanced in shape and in good health.

Pots or containers should be clean and undamaged. Where staking, tying or wiring is necessary, it should be done neatly and not detract from the appearance of the plant. The diameter of a pot is the inside measurement, made as close to the top as possible.

Plants should have clean, healthy unblemished foliage and flowers if present.

Plants with brightly coloured bracts are considered to be flowering plants for show purposes, e.g. Bougainvillea, Beloperone.

Cuttings, bulbs, tubers or corms normally grown more than one to a pot to give a full appearance, e.g. Tradescantia, Achimenes, or Freesia, are admissible as "one plant" even though there is more than one plant in the container.

If a plant grown for foliage is in flower at the time of the show, it may still be entered in the foliage class, where no account is taken of the flowers. If the flowers merit it, the same plant may alternatively be entered in a flowering pot plant class.

Ferns, bromeliads, orchids and similar epiphytic plants may be shown attached to a piece of bark or wood instead of in pots.

Cacti and Succulents

Cacti and succulents should be as free as possible from defects, including damaged or missing spines, distorted bodies or leaves, abnormal marks, etc.

Pots or containers should be clean and undamaged. Any staking should be neat and should not detract from the appearance of the plant.

COOKERY

Careful attention should be paid to the instructions/recipes – particularly tin sizes.

Cakes

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.

Preserves Use clear jars free from commercial trademarks with unmarked lids. All preserves should be labelled with small labels stating the main fruit used together with the 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, or a new twist top (in which case the wax disc is not used). 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 new vinegar proof lid, i.e. a plastic lined twist lid.

PHOTOGRAPHY

It is the mount you use which can enhance the photography, the colour of the mount should show off the subject of the photography. The border must not be more than 1 inch/2.5cm, larger and the picture can be disqualified.

The photograph print should not exceed 7x5 inches / 18x13 cm

Therefore, with the mount it should not exceed 9x7 inches / 23x18 cm

DAWLISH IN BLOOM

Dawlish is not just the town, Dawlish Parish / Manor runs from Holcombe all around the coast to Cockwood Harbour, then inland across to Houndspool, up on too Little Haldon and back around to Holcombe. Therefore, our In Bloom competition covers any garden within this area.

As with the photography, the maximum size of the photo is 7x5 inches / 18x13cm. It does not need to be mounted; however, having a mount can enhance the photograph.

Both the garden and the container photograph can be taken at any time of year; however, it needs to be in the year of the competition.

The photos are judged on the afternoon of the show by the public, so think about what appeals to the eye and not necessarily what is the best designed garden or the has the most unusual plants.

For the container, hanging basket or window box – it is a single one, not multiple ones. When you take the photo think about the angle and how the sun falls on it, this can alter during the day, lighting it up or leaving it dull.

Our latest show programme can be found on our website

