



Preparing Cut Flowers and Houseplants for Exhibit

Participating in flower shows at fairs can be fun and rewarding. Good exhibits help others learn about various types of flowers and plants. Judges use several criteria to evaluate cut flowers and houseplants. There are several things the exhibitor can do to meet these criteria to the highest level and receive top placing at the fair.

Preparing for the Show

After you know the show date and location, you'll want to read the fair book or flower show rules. The earlier you read them, the more time you'll have to find answers and ensure you understand what is expected. Many shows ask for preregistration by a certain date. The rules also will state the time when plants need to be at the show site.

Judging Criteria for Cut Flowers

Most judges use a point scale that includes categories or criteria with a specific number of points for each. The number of points per category often varies by class, but the total is usually 100. Some judges and flower shows will complete a physical scorecard. Other judges will simply use a sample scorecard to determine the weight certain factors should carry when evaluating the exhibit. See page 8 for sample score cards.

STEM & FOLIAGE The stem supporting the blooms should be strong and proportionate to the flower, not crooked, weak, damaged, or too short.

- If a stem grows with foliage attached, such as roses or chrysanthemums, it should be left on the stem unless it is in water.
- The leaves should be in good condition and proportional in size to the bloom and stem.

SIZE The size of the flower or plant often indicates how a plant has been grown.

- The size of a flower or plant should be as large as the variety allows under proper growing conditions.
- The stem and foliage should be proportional to the bloom size.
- Large blooms are not desirable if they are in poor condition or form.

FORM refers to a plant's ideal shape, structure, silhouette, size, and outline. For example, the petals of a single daisy are expected to be equal in length and similar in shape.

- The exhibit must have flowers and leaves with a form that is true to its type.
- Mechanical injury, insect and disease damage, or poor cultural practices can all cause poor form.

CONDITION & GROOMING

Condition reflects how close an entry is to its ideal stage of development at the time of judging.

- Flowers should not be too mature (faded or open too much) or immature (small, in bud, or not fully open).
- Grooming is how the specimen was prepared for the show and may include removing dirt, dead foliage, or spent flowers.
- Grooming should not alter the typical features of the plant or flower.

COLOR Good color is uniform, vivid, clear, bright, and typical of plant type.

- Flower colors should not show muddiness or fading.
- Foliage color should show no evidence of sunburn, scorching, bleaching, or uncharacteristic spotting.

SUBSTANCE describes the thickness and firmness of flower petals and foliage.

- Exhibits that show wilting, curling, fading, or browning have poor substance.

AMOUNT OF BLOOM Exhibits should have an appropriate number of blooms for their species or type.

- When more than one flower is exhibited, blooms should be similar in size, shape, and color.
- Often for sprays and spikes, more flowers on a stem are desirable. For example, several open flowers on a daylily spray would score higher.
- Disbudding, or removing a flower's side shoots, may produce the appropriate amount of bloom. Disbudding helps produce one single large flower per stem on plants that would otherwise have branched stems with smaller flowers.
- Alternatively, for standards or some rounded forms, multiple blooms are not appropriate. For example, several blooms on a stem of a hybrid tea rose would score lower since that type of rose should only have one bloom per stem.



Planning & Exhibiting

You can't control what the weather does to your plants, but you do control how you prepare your exhibit. Most flower shows have a process in place to allow you to change class the day of the show. Sometimes the flowers you intended to exhibit are not ready, but something else in your garden is. Switching an entry to a different class allows you to still be able to participate. Remember that different shows may use different rules. Always review the rules before you go out to cut your flowers.

CONDITIONING or hardening is the process used to extend the life of the cut flower in the vase.

- Take a container of lukewarm water (100° to 110°F) along to the garden. Immediately after cutting, place the stems in the water.
- When you return inside, place the container and flowers in a refrigerator set at 35° to 40°F for 3 to 12 hours. Cooling permits the plant to take up more water than it releases and helps hold flower freshness.
- Never store flowers in a refrigerator with fresh fruits or vegetables; they release ethylene gas which will reduce the vase life of the flowers.
- Recut the stems after conditioning and just before exhibiting. A new clean cut opens vessels for water uptake.
- If possible, fresh cuts on woody stems, such as roses, should be made underwater so air does not fill the exposed vessels and block water uptake.
- Floral preservatives can be added to the water to extend the vase life of cut flowers. Commercial preservatives are available from florist shops, hobby stores, or garden centers. Placing an aspirin or penny in the water (or any other homemade method) is ineffective as a floral preservative.

USE THE RIGHT CONTAINER

Some fairs and flower shows may require a specific type of container.

- If none is specified in the rules, use a simple container that does not detract from the flower. Clear, narrow-necked bottles and jars are often used.
- Ensure the container is heavy and wide enough to support the stem without easily tipping over.
- For best display, flowers should be about 1 1/2 to 2 times the height of the container. For example, a 10-inch tall container is best used for flowers with stems 15 to 20 inches above the rim.

HARVEST WITH CARE Plan to cut your flowers in the evening or early morning.

- For some species (like balloon flower), consider harvesting one day before the show, as some species will wilt immediately after harvest but will recover within 24 hours when placed in water.
- Always cut the stem several inches longer than necessary to allow for later trimming.
- Use a clean, sharp knife to carefully make a smooth, even cut. Scissors tend to pinch the ends of the stems and close off the water-conducting vessels.
- Remove any leaves on the stem that will be in water. Foliage covered with water will rot and cause discolored water and stem blockage. Blocked stems are unable to supply needed water to the living flower and make the exhibit deteriorate more rapidly.

SELECT THE BEST If you see something wrong with one of your flowers, the judge will see it too.

- Remember that flowers go through different stages, from bud to overmature.
- The guidelines outlined below suggest a "best stage of maturity" for several different flowers.

TRANSPORT CAREFULLY

Damage frequently occurs to flowers while transporting them to the fair.

- Place individual stems in soft drink or other narrow-necked bottles partially filled with water.
- Place bottles in soft cardboard drink cartons or larger boxes surrounded by newspapers or packing peanuts inside a box. Alternatively, bottles can be taped into the box's corners to prevent them from moving or tipping.
- Space the bottles so the blooms do not touch each other during transport to prevent damage to delicate petals or buds.
- For some flowers, wrapping each bloom gently in tissue paper can help protect it from sunlight, drafts, and bruising.



GROOM FOR THE SHOW Remove all soil and spray residue from the foliage, stems, and flowers. Remove loose soil with a soft bristled brush.

- Some leaves or petals (such as with some varieties of hosta) may have a natural dull, waxy, powdery, whitish coating on the surface referred to as “bloom” (also known as pruinose). When cleaning these species, be careful not to remove the “bloom.”
- Be careful not to damage the foliage or petals.
- Faded blooms, petals, and ragged leaves can be removed, but lower ratings may result if there is visible evidence of grooming—such as stubs or wounds.

LABEL CORRECTLY Clearly label each specimen with its common name, scientific name, and variety or cultivar.

- The common name is the name commonly used for the plant and can vary by region, country, or language. Plants may have one or several commonly known names. The same common name may refer to two different plants. Some plants, such as zinnia or hosta, have the same common and scientific name.
- The scientific name (or botanical name) is the universal name given to a plant. Each plant has only one scientific name that consists of two words. The first word is always capitalized and identifies the plant's genus. The second word is the specific epithet and is not capitalized. The scientific name is underlined (when handwritten) or printed in italics.
- A variety is a variation of a plant species in color, size, shape, or other attribute. A cultivar is the cultivated variety of a plant and was developed through a controlled breeding or hybridizing program. Single quote marks indicate a cultivar name, such as *Zinnia angustifolia* ‘Crystal White.’ Not all garden plants have a variety or cultivar name designated.
- When applicable, cultivar is particularly important as it allows the judges to know what the flower should look like. For example, a light pink color may be appropriate for a pink variety of lily but would indicate fading on a red variety.
- Correct and complete labeling helps make your exhibit a teaching tool for others.
- Judges may place an exhibit lower if it is not labeled or labeled incorrectly.

Guidelines for Preparing Cut Flowers for Exhibit

Always check and follow the specific guidelines provided for the show you are entering. Many types of flowers can be exhibited. If the particular flower you want to enter is not included in pages 4-7, follow the general guidelines outlined below for the appropriate form (round, spike, spray).

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR CUT FLOWER EXHIBITS

STANDARDS OR ROUND-FORM FLOWERS have an overall rounded shape.

They typically have one to a few flowers on a single stem. A standard is a round-form flower disbudded to have a single, large bloom on the stem.

EXAMPLES: aster, standard chrysanthemum, coneflower, cosmos, dahlia, daisy, dianthus, marigold, peony, rose, and zinnia

- Cut when fully developed, as indicated by the outer petals folding out gracefully. At this stage, the center petals are tighter than the outer petals but are not an immature green.
- Avoid exhibiting overmature flowers where the center is visible or any outer petals have begun to shrivel, fade, or curl.
- Round-form flower standards are exhibited as single-stem disbuds. This means only one flower is left at the tip of the stem. Young side shoots should be removed as soon as they can be seen. This procedure of “disbudding” produces a single, large bloom at the tip of the stem.

SPIKE-FORM FLOWERS are lengthened flower clusters in which the individual blooms are arranged along an axis or line and have short or absent stems. The flowers typically bloom from the bottom up and occasionally from the top down.

EXAMPLES: celosia, delphinium, gladiolus, hollyhock, liatris, salvia, and snapdragon

- Cut when the bottom florets are open and in perfect condition. The ideal choice has about one-third of the florets fully open, about one-third showing color as buds, and about one-third still green.
- All florets should still be present and in good condition (not shriveled); none should have browned petal edges or have faded color.
- The spike should be straight to the tip, and the stem should be sturdy.

SPRAY-FORM FLOWERS are flower clusters or panicles that have a main stem with side branches containing blooms on all sides.

EXAMPLES: ageratum, pompon and decorative type chrysanthemum, daylily, hydrangea, lily, phlox, and sweet pea

- Cut stems when some flowers are at prime maturity and some are showing color or are still in bud. Avoid sprays with spent blooms.
- Sprays should be exhibited with as many open flowers as possible.
- Select sprays with strong, uniform branches on all sides of the stem. Avoid one-sided or lopsided sprays.
- The quality of individual flowers is important. Each petal on every flower should be in good condition, not wilted, shriveled, or bruised.



Guidelines for Specific Cut Flower Exhibits

Always check the fair book for specific show guidelines. The quantities, stage of maturity, and other factors may differ from those listed in this publication. Always follow the guidelines outlined in the fair book.

COMMON & SCIENTIFIC NAME	NUMBER TO EXHIBIT	BEST STAGE OF MATURITY	FAULTS	PREPARATION
BACHELOR'S BUTTON <i>Centaurea cyanus</i>	1 spray	Blooms should be fully open; if multiple blooms are open on the same spray, all should be at the same stage of maturity; the small, slender dark/black florets in the center of the bloom should be just forming/opening	Petals brown or faded, color fading, center of the bloom open or flattened, dead blooms in the spray	Select a spray with at least one open flower (more would be better) with all flowers at the right stage of maturity; trim and place in cool water, remove soil from stem, foliage, and bloom
BEE BALM <i>Monarda didyma</i>	1 stem	All blooms fully open, with those on the inside just opening and those on the outside not yet faded	Petals brown or faded, overly mature with center of flower cluster open, leaves with powdery mildew, faded color, insect or disease damage, crooked stem	Cut stems with a sharp knife, place in cool water; remove any lower leaves that may be in water
BEGONIA <i>Begonia</i> × <i>tuberhybrida</i>	1 blooming plant in a pot or 1 bloom floating in water	Bloom fully open, showing no signs of color fading or browning of petal edges	Insect damage, misshapen bloom	Remove any soil from bloom, clip the bloom from the plant leaving 1/2 inch of stem and gently place in a shallow container with water
BLACK-EYED SUSAN <i>Rudbeckia</i>	1 spray	Blooms fully open	Weak or crooked stems, soil on exhibit, insect or disease damage on both petals and foliage, brown or drooping petals	Cut in the coolest parts of the day, remove any soil, remove any foliage underwater
CANNA <i>Canna</i> × <i>generalis</i>	1 stem	Bloom should be fully open with no signs of age	Overmature bloom, seed pods noticeable	Cut blooms in the coolest parts of the day
CELOSIA <i>Celosia argentea</i> (var. <i>cristata</i> , <i>plumosa</i> , <i>spicata</i>)	1 stem	Flower head full before mature seed is produced	Misshapen flower head, mature seed visible on flower, insect damage to leaves or flower, no foliage on specimen	Clean stem and leaves of soil, remove foliage that may be submerged in water
CHRYSAN- THEMUM <i>Chrysanthemum</i> × <i>morifolium</i>	1 spray or 1 large single flower if disbudded	Blooms should be fully open	Insect or disease damage, soil on specimen, misshapen or faded blooms, exhibiting more than one spray	Cut spray or stem and place in water-filled jars; make sure that no foliage is in the water
CONEFLOWER <i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	1 spray	Blooms fully open	Weak or crooked stems, soil on exhibit, insect or disease damage on both petals and foliage, brown or drooping petals, brown or faded petals	Cut in the coolest parts of the day; remove any soil, remove any foliage underwater
DAHLIA <i>Dahlia</i> × <i>hybrida</i>	1 stem	Blooms should be full with the depth being at least 1/2 the diameter of the flower; blooms should be at a 45° angle	Insect or disease damage, brown petals (over mature), blooms with a tight green center (immature), lopsided bloom, dull color, crooked or weak stems, no foliage, short stem, cultivar or class not listed	For a Saturday show, dahlias may be cut on Thursday and kept in a cool dark location; use a shape knife or bypass shear; leave at least one set (2 leaves) on stem; use a wedging device, such as foam, wood, newspaper, etc., to help keep the bloom straight in the container
DAISY <i>Leucanthemum</i> × <i>superbum</i>	1 or 3 blooms	Blooms fully open	Weak or crooked stems, soil on exhibit, insect or disease damage, brown or drooping petals	Cut in the coolest parts of the day; remove any soil

COMMON & SCIENTIFIC NAME	NUMBER TO EXHIBIT	BEST STAGE OF MATURITY	FAULTS	PREPARATION
DAYLILY <i>Heemerocallis</i>	1 spray	Specimens need at least one bloom fully open with buds in various stages of development	Insect or disease damage, seedpods present	Cut the morning of the show because the flowers last for only one day
DELPHINIUM (LARKSPUR) <i>Delphinium</i>	1 spike	Spikes should be straight with a few unopened buds at the top and no faded blooms at the bottom; select spikes that are large with as many open flowers as possible	Crooked spikes, insect or disease damage, too many flowers faded (over mature), not enough buds open (immature)	Cut with a sharp knife or bypass shear; place in cold water
GLADIOLUS <i>Gladiolus hybrids</i>	1 spike	Spikes should be straight in the container; use the rule of thirds (1/3 of the blooms fully open, 1/3 showing color, 1/3 in tight bud showing no flower color)	Crooked spikes, insect or disease damage, too many flowers open (over mature), not enough buds open (immature)	Cut with a sharp knife or bypass shear; place in warm water to encourage more blooms (florets) to open; use cold water or store in a cool place to slow additional blooms from expanding; bottom floret may be removed if over-mature (results in a 1 point deduction); use a wedging device, such as foam, wood, newspaper, etc., to help keep the spike straight in the container
HOLLYHOCK <i>Alcea rosea</i>	1 spike	Spikes should be straight; select spikes that use the rule of thirds (1/3 of the blooms fully open, 1/3 showing color, 1/3 in tight bud showing no flower color)	Crooked spikes, insect or disease damage on flowers or foliage, too many flowers faded or removed (over mature), not enough buds open (immature)	Cut with a sharp knife or bypass shear; place in cool water and remove any leaves under water; bottom floret may be removed if over mature (results in a 1 point deduction); use a wedging device, such as foam, wood, newspaper, etc., or weighted vase to help keep the spike straight in the container and prevent tipping
HOSTA <i>Hosta</i>	3 leaves or 1 flower stem	Leaves fully expanded, or 2/3 of flowers on one spike open	Leaves scorched or misshapen, brown edges or tips, variance in sizes of the three leaves, soil on leaves, insect or slug damage; lower flowers faded, no cultivar name provided	Select the most uniform set of three to exhibit; remove soil, be careful not to remove bloom (powdery coating) from leaves
HYDRANGEA <i>Hydrangea</i>	1 stem with 1 panicle	Large, symmetrical panicle of flowers with flowers uniformly open and flower color at the full intensity for the variety; dark green leaves free from blemishes	Individual florets lack uniformity in size, maturity, or color; asymmetrical, cleft/split, immature, or collapsing cluster/panicle; weak or crooked stems; leaves in the flower panicle	Cut stems at least 12 inches long 12 to 24 hours before show to allow flowers to recover should they wilt; remove any leaves underwater
LIATRIS <i>Liatris spicata</i>	1 spike	Spikes should be straight in container; upper blooms should be fully open and lower blooms tight	Crooked stem, browning/fading of upper flowers	Cut stems with a sharp knife, place in cool water; remove any lower leaves that may be in water
LILY (ORIENTAL/ASIATIC) <i>Lilium</i>	1 stem	Specimens need at least one bloom fully open with buds in various stages of development	Misshapen flowers, soil on the exhibit, insect or disease damage, and stamens still attached	Remove any soil, and carefully remove the six yellow or black anthers from the open flowers (the pollen stains fabric and petals)

COMMON & SCIENTIFIC NAME	NUMBER TO EXHIBIT	BEST STAGE OF MATURITY	FAULTS	PREPARATION
MARIGOLD (FRENCH OR SIGNET) <i>Tagetes patula</i> , <i>Tagetes tenuifolia</i>	1 or 3 sprays	Blooms should be in different stages of development (fully open, showing color, tight bud)	Insect damage, soil on foliage or flowers, specimen is not a spray, flowers misshapen	Cut sprays or stems in the early morning or evening; remove any soil or other residues
MARIGOLD (AFRICAN) <i>Tagetes erecta</i>	3 blooms	Blooms should be the same size; flowers are fully expanded with outer petals in prime conditions and inner petals still under-developed	Insect damage, soil on foliage or flowers, lack of uniformity between blooms, flowers misshapen, over mature (bloom too far open)	Cut stems in the early morning or evening; remove any soil or other residues
ORNAMENTAL GRASSES <i>Panicum</i> , <i>Miscanthus</i> , <i>Calamagrostis</i> , and others	3 leaves with 1 flower (if available)	Fully expanded leaves with variegation and color typical for species and cultivar; when in-season, fully expanded, symmetrical, well-shaped flowers included	Brown leaf tips or edges, damage from insect or disease; leaves that are creased or bent; leaves of different sizes (width and length) or color; flower not included if in-season; flower shedding pollen or seed	Cut three identical leaves with scissors at base; if flowers are present, cut one bloom at base; place all leaves and stems in one vase or bottle
PETUNIA <i>Petunia</i> × <i>hybrida</i>	1 spray	Select a spray that has blooms in various stages of development fully open, showing color, tight bud if possible	Seed pods present, soil on leaves or flowers; flowers wilted, brown, or misshapen; insect or disease damage	Remove all soil, remove any leaves underwater
PHLOX, GARDEN <i>Phlox paniculata</i>	1 stem	Select stems with large symmetrical panicles of flowers with most or all the individual flowers open but not past maturity. Panicles should be full of bright-colored flowers.	Flower clusters are misshaped, one-sided, or sparse; panicles with immature flowers (still in bud) or abundant spent flowers; faded color; leaves with powdery mildew; faded flowers hanging from the panicle cluster	Cut stems with a sharp knife, place in cool water; remove any lower leaves that may be in water. Carefully remove any faded flowers that are dried or hanging from the panicle
ROSE <i>Rosa</i>	Tea: 1 stem with 1 bloom Grandiflora & Floribunda: 1 stem with 1 bloom or 1 stem with cluster of blooms Shrub or miniature rose: 1 spray with cluster of blooms	Bloom should be half open; sprays need at least one bloom fully open with buds in various stages of development	Blooms are fully open (full-blown), insect or disease damage, tight bud (immature), no foliage, weak stems	Cut roses in the early morning or the evening; roses that are at the correct stage of maturity may be kept in a cool or refrigerated area to slow the aging process; roses may be wrapped with bathroom tissue to protect and hold them from further expansion
SALVIA <i>Salvia</i>	3 stems	Stems should be at the same stage of maturity with no faded blooms at the base of the spike. Longer spikes may have unopened blooms at the top. Short spikes can have all blooms open.	Faded blooms, soil present on blooms, insect or disease damage, lack of uniformity between stems	Cut stems with a sharp knife, place in cool water; remove any lower leaves that may be in water.
SNAPDRAGONS <i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	3 stems	Flowers exhibit all three stages of development using the rule of thirds (1/3 of the blooms fully open, 1/3 showing color, 1/3 in tight bud showing no flower color)	Faded blooms, soil present on blooms, insect or disease damage, crooked stems, too many flowers open (over mature), not enough buds open (immature)	Cut stems with a sharp knife, place in cool water; remove any lower leaves that may be in water

COMMON & SCIENTIFIC NAME	NUMBER TO EXHIBIT	BEST STAGE OF MATURITY	FAULTS	PREPARATION
SUNFLOWER <i>Helianthus</i>	Small-flowered or multi-stem varieties: 1 spray Large-flowered or single-stem varieties: 1 stem with 1 bloom	Large flower heads with bright-colored petals surrounding a dark center. Small-flowered cultivars should be sprays of blooms in similar stages of maturity with no faded blooms on the stem, unopened buds are fine. (Note: Sunflowers grown for seed production are judged using different criteria than those grown for cut flowers)	Brown, wilted, or faded petals, insect or disease damage, overly mature with center shedding pollen or forming distinct seeds, powdery mildew on foliage	Cut stems with sharp knives or pruners if needed; remove dirt and dust; display in a weighted vase (heavy-bottomed, marbles or pebbles in base, etc.) to prevent tipping
YARROW <i>Achillea millefolium</i> , <i>Achillea filipendulina</i>	3 stems	Flower head is full, relatively symmetrical, and flat with inner florets just opening	Brown or discolored florets, misshapen flower head, insect damage, immature (unopened florets)	Select three stems with flowers in similar size and maturity; clean stem and leaves of soil, remove foliage that may be submerged in water
ZINNIA <i>Zinnia angustifolia</i> , <i>Zinnia elegans</i> , <i>Zinnia haageana</i> , <i>Zinnia tenuifolia</i>	3 blooms, no buds	Flower head is full, symmetrical, free from pollen, brightly colored, with an evenly developed center.	Petals are faded, brown, greyed, scorched, or discolored; blooms immature, over mature, or with irregular or uneven development in the center, leaves with damage from insects or disease.	Select three blooms that are matched in color, size, and stage of maturity; remove soil from stem, foliage, and bloom



Exhibiting Houseplants and Potted Plants

CRITERIA USED TO JUDGE HOUSEPLANTS AND POTTED PLANTS

FORM (SHAPE) The plant's overall shape must be a pleasing form or shape and align with what is typical for the species.

- Unless not typical for the species, the leaves of a foliage houseplant are expected to be nearly the same in size and shape.

CONTAINER The pot should be appropriate and functional for growing plants (adequately sized, includes a drainage hole, etc.).

- The container's color, texture, and style should complement the plant without drawing attention away from it.

CULTURAL PERFECTION evaluates how the plant was grown.

- The appearance should show evidence of good cultural techniques, such as proper fertilization, watering, pest control, disbudding, dividing, removal of spent blooms, and quality potting soil.

CONDITION Plants should be in prime condition with no browning, yellowing, faded, discolored, spotted, or otherwise unhealthy foliage.

- The blooms should not be faded, wilted, or damaged if in flower.
- Foliage and containers should be free of dust or grime with no signs of insect or disease issues.

SIZE Houseplants should be an appropriate size for the species.

- Ideally, the plant should be as large as the variety allows under proper growing conditions.
- Plants should be in scale with the container. Avoid overly large or small containers.

SYMMETRY The houseplant should be balanced and symmetrical from side to side and front to back.

- If a line were drawn from top to bottom through the middle, both sides would look similar and balanced.
- Plants should not appear top-heavy or unbalanced.

NAME (LABEL) Houseplants should be accurately labeled with common and scientific names and include variety or cultivar when appropriate (See "Label Correctly" section on p.3)

- If the container contains more than one species or variety, all must be listed.
- Judges may place an exhibit lower if it is not labeled or labeled incorrectly.

TIPS FOR EXHIBITING HOUSEPLANTS AND POTTED PLANTS

- Follow the show guidelines.
- All potted plants should be free of insects and diseases.
- Foliage plants are judged on the quality and appearance of leaves and stems. Colors should be bright, clear, and typical of the species or cultivar.
- Flowering plants are judged for their display of flowers but should not show obvious foliage damage. A comparison of the number of open flowers and buds is typically used to evaluate similar entries.
- Plant size should be above average in spread, fullness, and height. Good branching is often more desirable than extra height.
- Plant shape should be symmetrical. A one-sided or unevenly developed plant indicates that it has not been rotated regularly and has grown toward the light source.
- Use clean containers that are in proportion to plant size. The container's color, texture, and style should complement the plant without drawing attention away from it.
- Show rules may specify ownership for a minimum time, such as six months. Plants that appear to be recently potted or purchased may be disqualified.
- Groom carefully. Lower ratings may result if signs of grooming are visible, such as removing essential petals or leaves, stubs, or wounds.
- Most show guidelines ask for both the common and scientific names; for example, heartleaf philodendron, *Philodendron cordatum*. Lower scores may be given if it is not labeled or labeled incorrectly.
- One way to avoid plant damage during transportation to the show is by placing the container in a box with newspapers stuffed between the pot and the box. Allow plenty of room for the plant, but pack tightly around the container to prevent it from tipping over.



Resources

Additional information on flowers and houseplants available from local ISU Extension offices and the following ISU sources.

- Extension Store <https://store.extension.iastate.edu/> 515-294-5247
- Yard and Garden Website <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu>
 - Check this site for links to horticulture newsletters, care and how-to articles, FAQs, and other resources related to gardening in Iowa.
- Iowa 4-H <https://extension.iastate.edu/4H> 515-294-1018
- Plant and Insect Diagnostic Clinic <https://yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu/pidc>
 - pidc@iastate.edu 515-294-0581

Revision by Aaron Steil, extension horticulturist, and Cindy Haynes, extension horticulturist. Originally prepared by Linda Naeve, former extension horticulture associate, and Henry Taber, former extension horticulturist. Past revisions by Cindy Haynes, extension horticulturist; James Romer, former master gardener coordinator; and Diane Nelson, former communication specialist.

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Sample Score Cards

CUT FLOWERS

CRITERIA	POSSIBLE POINTS
Color	15
Form	15
Substance	10
Amount of Bloom	10
Stem & Foliage	10
Size	15
Condition & Grooming	25
TOTAL	100

HOUSEPLANTS AND POTTED PLANTS

CATEGORY	POSSIBLE POINTS
Form (shape)	10
Condition	30
Cultural Perfection	20
Size	10
Symmetry	15
Container	10
Name (label)	5
TOTAL	100

