

Suggestions to Exhibitors for the show

Here are some suggestions that may help you better understand the show, how it is judged, and how to get the most out of the day. Where pages are referenced, they will be in the RHS publication *The Horticultural Show Handbook*, ISBN 9781907057656

General Suggestions

1 **The Schedule**

Read the schedule very carefully, including all the rules. If anything is not clear contact the show secretary immediately. Where possible, the solution of problems should not be left until the show day.

2 **Dates and times**

The dates and times given in the schedule should be carefully noted and adhered to, particularly:

- the deadline for making an entry;
- staging times
- when the show closes, and the time by which exhibitors must have removed their property.

3 **Entry form**

Ensure your completed entry form is submitted to the right person by the deadline at the latest, but earlier if possible.

4 **Avoid making too many entries**

Only put in an entry for classes if you are reasonably sure that you will be able to stage an exhibit in it. Failing to produce the exhibits or late cancellations make it very difficult to layout the staging appropriately, and mean that in some classes the exhibits are crowded and elsewhere there are vacant spaces.

5 **The number of specimens required**

Pay particular attention to the number of specimens for which the schedule asks, as an exhibit consisting of either more or less will be liable to disqualification (NAS: 'not according to schedule').

6 **Uniformity of specimens constituting an exhibit**

In any competitive exhibit uniformity of all the characteristics of the specimens constituting the exhibit is important. It is unwise to mix, for example, large specimens with others that are smaller as this will weaken the exhibit.

7 **The judges' decision**

The judges' decision is final and should be accepted with good grace.

The preparation and presentation of fruit

Picking

Pick as near to show time as possible, taking care not to damage fruit. Harvest currants, jostaberries and worcesterberries with the strigs intact, choosing the longest strigs with the largest fruits. Pick grapes as a complete bunch and cut each bunch with a piece of lateral shoot on either side of the stalk to form a T-handle. Pick apricots, nectarines and peaches, blueberries

and citrus fruits without any attached stalk and stem. Take care not to split the skin in the stalk cavity. Show all other fruits with stalks fresh and intact.

Handle all fruits as little and as gently as possible and by their stalks, if possible, so that the natural bloom is not spoilt. Use scissors to remove soft fruits. Under no circumstances should fruit be polished.

Selection

The desirable qualities of each kind of fruit are set out in Judging Fruits (see pp63—86 of the Handbook)

Choose only fruits as near to perfection as possible. The fruits should be fresh, uniform, free from blemish and characteristic in shape and colour. Refer to the show schedule to see what is required, but pick more than is necessary so that reserves are available when staging. Do not use overripe fruits. Unripe fruits are not ideal except where allowed in certain classes (see Ripeness, p64). Figs with signs of splitting and gages with signs of slight shrivelling can be exhibited as this is a sign of ripeness.

Packing

Pack carefully bearing in mind that soft fruits may be damaged by their own weight; avoid packing too many in one container. Keep in a cool place.

Presentation and staging

Aim for a neat, attractive presentation, as symmetrical as possible. **Do not polish the fruits.**

- **Apples and similar-shaped fruits** should be staged with the eye uppermost, stalk end downwards, placing one fruit in the centre and the remainder around it. The centre fruit can be raised. Do not cut the stalks.
- **Berries, excluding blueberries**, look most attractive if placed in lines. The stalks and calyces should look green and fresh and all point one way. Reject malformed and damaged fruits. Blueberries should be staged around the perimeter of a plate.
- **Worcesterberries and currant x gooseberry hybrids** should have strigs intact and laid roughly parallel, the bottom of the strigs to the front of the plate. Mound the fruit in the centre.
- **Grapes** are usually shown in one of two ways. Unless some other method of staging is specified or permitted by the schedule, glasshouse grapes should be staged on stands and should be pulled well up onto the board. Outdoor grapes grown for winemaking or dessert may be shown on plates.
- **Most pears, pear-shaped quinces and figs** are best arranged around the perimeter of the plate with the stalks towards the centre.
- **Plums, cherries and similar-shaped fruits** are best laid out in lines across the plate. It is important that the bloom is not disturbed and the stalks are intact.

The preparation and presentation of vegetables

Where necessary, vegetables should be carefully washed to remove soil but in no circumstances should oils or similar substances be applied in an attempt to enhance their appearance. Wash with a soft cloth and plenty of water: brushing will damage the skin and spoil the appearance of the exhibit. Retain the natural 'bloom' wherever possible. All vegetables should be handled carefully during preparation.

Vegetables should be staged as attractively as possible on plates or direct on the table.

Advice on selected vegetable classes

Full advice can be found in the RHS Handbook

- **Beans, broad; French, climbing or dwarf; runner; and shelling, other than broad (eg borlotti and similar types)** Exhibit fresh pods of uniform colour. Stage a uniform-sized exhibit with pods arranged on a plate or directly on the bench; in a line with the tail ends facing the front. With all beans it is advisable to check one or two spare pods to assess the condition and interior freshness. Cut all pods from the vine with scissors, ensuring that each pod has a portion of stalk.
- **Beetroot** Select roots of even size; for globe beetroot, between 60 and 75mm; for long beetroot as for parsnips (see p48); and for cylindrical cultivars, roots approximately 150mm in length. Avoid specimens with poor skin colour at the base of the root or that do not have a single small taproot. Small side roots should be removed. Take care in washing as all marks will show up clearly after a few hours. Trim foliage to approximately 75mm.
- **Brussels sprouts** Cut from the main stem with a knife, all stalks to be approximately the same length. Choose tightly closed sprouts of uniform size. Do not remove too many outer leaves, otherwise depth of colour is reduced.
- **Cabbages** Choose solid heads of equal size, clean and with good waxy bloom. Take care not to mark the bloom. Reject split specimens and any damaged by pests. Remove only a minimum of outer leaves. Stage with approximately 75mm of stalk remaining and heads towards the front.
- **Carrots** should have the soil or growing medium soaked at the time of lifting to minimise damage to the root. Cut off the foliage to approximately 75mm. Lay side by side in a triangular formation with the root end facing the front.
- **Cauliflowers, calabrese and broccoli, coloured-headed** Reject pest damaged, discoloured, split, loose or uneven-sized heads. Stage with approximately 75mm of stalk remaining. Just prior to staging, trim back leaves so that they match the level of the outside of the curd.
- **Courgettes** Select young, tender, shapely and uniform fruits approximately 150mm in length and approximately 25—35mm in diameter, in any colour, or in the case of round cultivars approximately 75mm in diameter. Stage flat with or without flowers still attached.
- **Cucumbers** Fruits should be completely matched and of a good, fresh green colour. The flower end should be completely developed, the barrel well shaped and with a short handle. Display specimens flat on the show bench. It is not necessary that flowers remain attached. Cucumbers grown under protection should be 250mm or more in length. Outdoor-grown cucumbers can be smaller.
- **Garlic** Clean off all soil fragments, dry completely. Reduce the dried stem to approximately 25mm and remove the roots. Stage bulbs as complete specimens; do not divide into segments (cloves)
- **Onions** Uniform, well-ripened bulbs of good colour are required. Avoid soft, stained specimens with thick, immature necks. Do not over-skin. The tops should be neatly tied and the roots neatly trimmed back to the basal plate. Onions are often staged on rings or soft collars. Pickling onions should not exceed 30mm in diameter nor should the necks be tied.
- **Peppers, sweet and hot (chilli)** Select fruit of the right shape, size and colour for the cultivar. The exhibit should be uniform in colour. Fruit may be shown immature but fully

formed, usually green, or at the mature or coloured stage. Mature specimens are to be preferred.

- **Potatoes** Select medium-sized specimens, generally between 200g and 250g. Choose equally matched tubers with shallow eyes. Freedom from skin blemishes that may be caused by pests, diseases or careless handling is important. Very carefully wash the tubers in clean water with a soft sponge — do not use a coarse cloth or brush. Stage on plates with the rose end outwards.
- **Rhubarb** Stalks should be fresh, straight, long and tender with well developed colouring. Cut off top foliage of natural rhubarb leaving approximately 75mm from start of leaf stalks. Do not cut off foliage of forced rhubarb. Wipe stalks clean and trim off any bud scales at the bottom.
- **Squash, summer** Select young, tender, shapely and uniform fruits, normally not more than five days after flowering. Cut fruit from the vine, taking care not to mark the tender flesh. Stage as for courgettes.
- **Squash, winter** Select fully coloured, mature fruit, with few blemishes, and of a size according to cultivar. Retain the stalk.
- **Sweet corn** Cobs of uniform size with fresh green husks should be displayed with approximately one quarter of the grain exposed by pulling down sharply, from the tip to the base. The best cobs are filled to the tip with straight rows of tender grains. The grains should be well-filled, not shrivelled. Tie stalks should be trimmed.
- **Tomatoes** Select fruit of the right shape, size and colour for the cultivar. Fruit should not be overripe or with hard 'green back' colouring around the calyx. Aim for a uniform firm set of ripe fruits with firm, fresh calyces. Stage on a plate, calyx uppermost.
- **Tomatoes, truss** Cut the truss from the plant carefully, as near the main stem as possible. Both mature and immature fruits may be shown but at least one third of the fruits should be fully ripe, displaying the natural colour for the cultivar.
- **Turnips and swedes** Select fresh, tender, disease-free roots of a size and shape according to cultivar, but not over-large, and with a small taproot. Wash carefully, remove dead foliage. Cut a spare root to check inside for disease and condition.

The preparation and presentation of flowers

- **Cutting** The ideal time to cut flowers is in the evening (or early morning if that is not possible). Flowers should be cut with as much stem as possible, making a slanting cut to assist the uptake of water. Sometimes flowers (such as chrysanthemums and penstemons) may not absorb water easily and the stems can be slit upwards (approximately 75mm) under water to assist. After cutting, remove sideshoots, unwanted buds and lower leaves and place the flowers upright in a container of clean deep water. It is better for this to be done overnight if possible, and then the container of flowers should be placed in a cool dark room. To save time at the show, labels showing the name of the cultivar can be written in advance, using cards or paper.
- **Transit to a show** Many exhibitors carry their exhibits in vases in 'milk crates', making sure that packing prevents excessive movement of each flower during transportation. If using supports for flower stems, they should be removed prior to staging. It is useful to take spare containers to assist when staging.

- **Staging** Carefully unpack each flower and place in a spare container. Fill each exhibition vase with fresh water prior to staging. Stage each vase carefully, ensuring that the stem is neither too long nor too short and that damaged leaves are removed. If inexperienced, look at the experienced exhibitors' staging, particularly height and spacing of blooms. Blooms should all face the same direction unless 'all round effect' is required by the class. Place exhibits in the classes entered and place labels with the exhibit.
- **Pot plants** 'All-round effect' is important in most pot plants (see also p162—163) and plants should be turned every few days. This is particularly important in the few days before a show. If necessary, flowers and leaves should be gently teased' out so that the plant is displayed at its best. Any damaged foliage or flowers can be carefully removed. Take care during transit that the plant arrives undamaged. Final preparation should involve removing any faded foliage and flowers back to the base, and ensuring that the container is clean. Stage the plant so that its best side is towards the front, and place the label nearby.