

Tips for Showing Vegetables, Flowers, and Cookery Exhibits.

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 can 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 there are two excellent publications available. The RHS publishes "The Horticultural Show Handbook" which gives more detailed information and criteria on showing flowers, fruit and vegetables and can be purchased from the RHS at [RHS Horticultural Show Handbook - Books from RHS Publications](#). The National Vegetable Society also has a publication called "NVS Judges & Exhibitors Guide" which is dedicated to vegetables only and can be purchased at [NVS Publications | National Vegetable Society \(nvsuk.org.uk\)](#). Most Horticultural and Village Shows tend to use the RHS guide.

VEGETABLES

Potatoes.

Potatoes should be as far as possible of the same shape and size, with eyes that are shallow. They must be carefully washed so as not to damage the skins, but with all traces of earth removed. They should be of a good size, not too large and not too small (around 170g to 225g is a reasonable guide). 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, try not to scrub them as this will cause skin damage. The skins should be undamaged and they should be of similar colour, 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. Try to remove all of the hairy roots along the length of the exhibit and at the root base. 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.

Onions.

Onions should be uniform in shape and size. Be careful to ensure that they conform to any weight restrictions as the judge will check to ensure that they conform to the schedule. 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 to the base plate and the top of the onion (the neck), which should be thin, about 1-2cm long and neatly tied. The onions should be staged on rings 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.

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. Read the schedule carefully as there are different size classes and check that they ALL conform.

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, grubs or white fly 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 approximately 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 earth. The skins should be undamaged and they should be of similar size, shape and colour, 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. If they are too large and woody they will be marked down. Rubbing them with cooking oil or any other substance to enhance their appearance is likely to get them disqualified.

Courgettes.

Courgettes should be fresh and be between 100 to 200mm in length (stalk to tip and excluding any flower) and of uniform shape and size whilst displaying a good all over skin colour without blemishes. The flowers can be left attached but this is not a must. Do not cut the courgettes too close to the fruit as they should have about 2 cm of stalk attached. They should be clean without the need for washing which can be detrimental to their natural appearance. In case of 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 2 cm of stalk attached and with the dead flower intact (not essential but desirable) 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. If more than one is called for then they should be uniform in length, girth and colour.

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 cm 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. There are generally two different sizes of shallot called for, check the schedule to ensure that they all meet the size requirement as the judge will check that they are as the schedule calls for.

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. Transport your exhibits dry, as they will discolour if kept damp.

Leeks.

Leeks should be thoroughly washed with the soil teased and washed from the roots, which should not be cut off. The flags (leaves) should also not be cut and be in good condition. The barrel of the leek 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.

FRUIT**Apples and Pears.**

Apples and Pears should be exhibited with stalks attached and the fruit should not be polished. Fruit should be uniform in shape and size with skins free from blemishes, pest damage, patches of discoloration and bruising etc. Specimens should also be fresh. Ripeness of fruit is not so important. When exhibiting apples and pears, there are often classes for dessert and cooking, so ensure that you present the correct variety for the class entered.

Berries.

Always ensure that you are exhibiting the correct berry type in the class entered. All berries should be fully ripe and firm to the touch. Do not exhibit soft fruit that are over ripe as they will tend to bleed onto the plate and be down pointed. Where berries on a strig are called for, try to ensure that

all strigs have the same number of berries on each and are of similar size, if not on strigs then each specimen must be complete with stalks. Some judges disapprove of foliage on the plate, which tends to distract from the exhibit. The choice is yours.

Things to note when exhibiting vegetables and fruit

Generally, and in order of points awarded, the condition of the exhibit(s) has the highest number of points awarded followed by uniformity (when more than one type is called for), size, shape and colour. Some lettuces for example are also judged on firmness. For any exhibit that needs to be trimmed, do that when staging as it will leave a fresh cut. Please ensure that all mud and dirt is cleaned off your exhibit before staging and that there is no “wildlife” present.

Runner beans and tomatoes are best staged on black.

FLOWERS

Generally speaking flowers and foliage should all be clean and free from disease and insect damage. Where possible choose vases to suit the height of the stems.

Daffodils

It is very important that daffodil blooms are clean and fresh. The perianth and corona should be fresh and clean and free of nicks and tears etc. Unless the variety has different characteristics, the flower should be at near to a right angle in respect of the stem. When showing more than one flower in an exhibit the flowers should be of similar size and arranged symmetrically e.g. if three flowers are shown the centre flower should sit higher than the other two. Leaves of a daffodil plant enhance the appearance of the exhibit – use one leaf per flower with the leaf placed behind the bloom and being slightly taller than the flower. Daffodils can be cut up to a week ahead of the show date and kept in cold water in a cool dark environment. They can then be brought into the warm and light a day or two before the show so they are at their best on the show date. It is also meritorious if you can have the petals of the perianth totally symmetrical, this can be achieved by **very gently** rotating/twisting (“clocking”) the stem/immature seed head at the back of the flower so that the petals of the perianth are in identical positions for each flower. To ensure your blooms are upright in the vase it is useful to use some kitchen roll or similar material to pack out the vase. Remember that good staging always impresses the judge and the exhibit that “sits up and stares the judge in the face” is going to be noticed!

Sometimes the blooms of the daffodil can show signs of green discoloration. This is more likely than not going to be caused by immaturity. The problem can often be rectified by placing the bloom in a vase of warm (more than tepid but not boiling) water for a few hours. .

Pot Plants

As noted above, ensure that the pot size meets the requirement of the Schedule. Clean the outside of the pot before staging and remove any weed seeds from the compost. Carefully trim back all dead and diseased growth. If the Schedule calls for foliage only plants make sure that there are no flower stems present.

COOKERY

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

