

WHAT GOES INTO A GOOD EXHIBIT?

When we exhibit garden items at the Fair, we gain knowledge. We learn how to produce a good specimen, how to prepare and transport it, how to share our knowledge with others and learn what our friends have produced, and finally, through judging, how well we have met approved standards.

Exhibitors should familiarize themselves with terms such as "type", "uniformity", "maturity", "and freedom from damage", "substance and cultural perfection".

The Judges criteria for classes are that all specimens should be true to type—characteristics common to that particular species and subspecies of flower, vegetable or fruit. Uniformity refers to a specimen's size, shape and color. If the preliminary list calls for a single specimen, it must show it is true to type; many categories call for multiple lots and the lot members should be uniform in every respect. It is taken for granted that all members of a lot should be of the same variety. Also when a particular variety has a special characteristic, it should be present in all specimens; for example, a fruit, which has a pink cheek, the size, shape, and degree of pinkness of the cheek, should be the same in all specimens exhibited. Symmetry in shape and good color also are factors to consider.

All produce should be mature. Items that have not opened full or are not fully ripened should not be shown. However, overripe or over-mature material also is not suitable.

The term "freedom from damage" encompasses mechanical injury, that is, damage caused by man or machine while the plant is growing or the specimen has been picked; it also can be caused in transit to the Fair.

Insects or diseases cause another type of damage, and this will greatly affect scoring. Spraying or dusting will control pests, but pesticide residue also will cause points to be deducted. Soil or dirt on a specimen is inexcusable. Substance means that a specimen is not wilting or shriveled, that the cells within the specimen are full of water and that the specimen will hold up well on the Fair exhibit table. A specimen of good substance is at the peak of maturity and has had proper handling.

An exhibit that shows signs of nutrient deficiencies, crooked or weak stems, flowers placed at an improper angle on the stem, weather-spattered areas on the leaves or flowers, foliage burn due to high light intensities or sprays, bleached areas on the underside of the fruit, or sunburned areas lacks cultural perfection.

Preparing a specimen to take to the Fair is essential. Good conditioning begins the moment the stem of a flower, fruit or vegetable is severed from the parent plant. Be sure and use a sharp knife. For flowers, place the cut stems in water immediately. Cut stems on a slant; this is beneficial because the stems will not squarely touch the bottom of a container and the water-conducting vessels of the plant are less likely to become clogged with dirt.

WHAT GOES INTO A GOOD EXHIBIT?

When handling produce, care should be used when picking. Fruits and vegetables should be placed in a cloth or paper-lined basket with pieces of soft paper between specimens. This reduces mechanical injury and insures good appearance. Do not place too many vegetables or fruits in one basket; this will reduce the possibility of crushing or bruising. Do not crowd flowers in a container.

In most instances, when flowers and vegetables come into prime exhibiting condition, it is wise to pick them and place them in the refrigerator at 40° to 45° temperatures.

Sometimes when fruits or vegetables are stored in a refrigerator then removed to warm temperatures at the Fair, the skin may shrivel, especially on tomatoes. For this reason, remove vegetables from the refrigerator for a few hours before entering them and place them in a cool spot slightly warmer than the refrigerator; this way, the specimens become gradually acclimated to their future environment.

Cleaning specimens is important; however care must be taken to properly and safely clean items. Root crops, such as carrots and beets and underground specimens like potatoes should be washed but not scrubbed. Scrubbing leaves marks and will shorten the life of the produce.

Leaf crops, such as chard and cabbage, need only be gently sprayed to remove soil or spray residues.

Other fruits and vegetables can be cleaned with a moist clean cloth and brushing gently with a painter's brush often can clean soft specimens. Removal of soil from a flower or plant is important and relatively simple, but does require more patience. A gentle spray of water from a faucet or syringe can remove any loose soil. If soil particles remain, syringe the foliage with mild soapy water, and rinse with clear water. Spray residue in the same manner. Care also must be taken that foliage is gently rubbed with a soft cloth; some species are prone to spotting when droplets of water fall on them.

Application of materials to foliage, particularly that of houseplants, to make it shine is not considered proper in exhibition. Leaves can be made to shine by rubbing them with a dry flannel cloth to bring out the natural oils.

When transporting materials to the Fair, use a carrying rack or paper milk cartons. Place crushed newspapers between containers and wrap flowers lightly with tissue paper to prevent damage to petals. Wrap vegetables and fruits in tissue paper or newspapers.

--Adapted from the Cooperative Extension Service publication,
"Exhibiting Flowers, Fruits and Vegetables"