

NOTES FOR NOVICES

GENERAL ADVICE ON PREPARATION OF EXHIBITS

Root vegetables should be carefully washed with a soft cloth and plenty of water to remove soil - brushing will damage the skin. Leaves should be trimmed to the length specified in the schedule and the ends tied neatly with undyed raffia or string.

Fruit (and fruit classified as vegetables i.e. beans, peas, tomatoes, cucumbers, courgettes, aubergines, squash, pumpkins etc) should generally be picked by cutting the stalk cleanly either with scissors or a sharp knife and displayed with the stalk intact. Exceptions are apricots, nectarines and peaches - pick these without any attached stalk. Handle fruit only by the stalks and as little as possible to retain bloom.

Pick the flowers early in the morning or late in the evening. Cut stems as long as possible and slope the cut to assist water absorption - slit stems over the bottom 75mm for varieties known to be reluctant to absorb water.

Transport the flowers to the show either horizontally, wrapped in paper, or, preferably vertically in securely held containers of water.

Remove any remaining side shoots, buds or immature flowers and the lower leaves and store in deep filled vases in the dark since stalks may well bend if the blooms turn to face the source of light.

TYPE SPECIFIC ADVICE ON EXHIBITING

Beans - Align parallel in a row with all stalks at one end. Credit is given for straight, tender snap specimens of good, uniform length with little outward signs of seeds.

Beetroot - Wash extra carefully and gently as marks show up clearly when the skin dries. Ideally, round specimens 60-75mm in diameter, cylindrical about 150mm long. Credit given for smooth, blemish-free skins of good uniform colour and the presence of a single tap root. Small hair-like side roots may be carefully removed provided the skin remains unmarked.

Cabbage - Trim off only a minimum of outer discoloured leaves so that outer colour is a good green. Display with about 50mm of stem, heads facing forward.

Carrots - Soak soil before lifting to minimize damage to the tip of the root.

Courgettes - Young, tender fruit of good uniform shape - length about 150mm, diameter about 35mm (round cultivars about 75mm in diameter)

Cucumbers - Fresh, large but young, matched fruit with stalk attached.

Lettuce - Pick late evening or early morning, Wash roots ensuring that soil does not collect between leaves.

RHS suggest you wrap roots in very moist tissue and insert them into a small plastic bag and tie the open end so that the lettuce does not go limp. Our schedule allows roots to be placed in a dish of water. Remove minimum of outer leaves. Display with hearts facing forward.

Marrows - Tender young fruit of length less than 350mm (round varieties less than 500mm circumference).

Gently wipe skins clean.

Onions and shallots - Remove loose skin but do not overskin as good uniform colour is required. Trim roots neatly back to basal plate. Tops should be tied or whipped with uncoloured raffia. Display onions on collars, shallots staged as separate bulbs not as clusters and arranged in a plate of sand.

Peppers - Fruit should be fully formed but may be either green or ripe (Ripe will get more credit)

Potatoes - Weight 175 - 225gm with shallow eyes. Clean carefully but thoroughly. Stage on plates with the "rose" end outward. Note: a mainly white potato with slightly pink or purple eyes is classified as "other than white"

Sweetcorn - Display with silks. Trim stalk. Pull down (and if necessary remove some of the husks) to display about a quarter of the grains over the length of the cob. Cob should be filled with straight rows of tender plump grains and husk a fresh green.

Tomatoes - Show with calyx and some stalk. Display on a plate, calyx side uppermost.

Apples - Display with the eye uppermost but with stalk intact. Arrange in a circle with one apple in the middle - if desired raised on a cushion of white tissue.

Berries - Arrange stalk uppermost in two or three lines for ease of counting. Stalks should all point one way and credit is given for fresh green stalks and calyces. If raspberries are wet do not pick the fruit individually cut the raspberry cane with required fruit, bring indoors and place cane in water and cut the raspberry stems when the fruit are dry.

Pears - Can be arranged round the perimeter of a plate with the stalks pointing towards the middle.

Plums - Arrange in a circle or in lines, stalk uppermost. Can arrange on a plate.

Grapes - Cut with a piece of the vine to form a "T" handle.

Delphiniums - Remove any side spikes from the main spike. The stem should be vertical with at least 10cm of stem showing and the packing disguised with delphinium foliage.

Gladioli - Ideally the bottom blossom of the spike should still be fresh.

Annuals and perennials - Either a single flower to a stem or if the variety simultaneously produces a head flower and nearly fully developed side flowers, a stem with predominately fully open and well developed blooms.

Pansy and Fuchsia blooms - 6 blooms are displayed singly in special society containers - pick with the maximum possible stalk. Fuchsia flowers should be about to show or show pollen on the anthers and the stigma should be fresh.

GENERAL

To have an exhibit ready on Show day you may well have to sacrifice earlier specimens and encourage specimen blooms by removing side shoots. Conversely, flowers displayed as a cluster or spray may need the head flower bud removed sufficiently early to allow the remaining flowers to fill the gap by show day.

A few days before the show confirm the classes for which you can raise an entry and send your completed entry form to the Show Secretary at least two days before the show (We take telephone entries, but this is definitely not the norm). Late entries are accepted (at a small financial penalty) up to noon before the day of the show.

If possible provide the variety of the entry in each class so that variety cards can be prepared. Variety cards provide the judge with guidance on the size, shape and colour against which your entry is judged.

Keep plants well watered before picking your exhibits. When selecting exhibits remember that the aim is uniformity across the exhibit. An exhibit with 5 medium sized specimens will score better than a one with three large and two medium sized specimens. Pick, prepare and bring a few spares to the show in case some are damaged in transit.

When you arrive at the show, report to the Show Secretary's desk to collect your entry cards and any variety cards you requested. Keep these dry as the ink used is not waterproof. If you have been unable to produce an entry for a class you have entered please inform the show secretary and leave the entry card clearly marked "NOT ENTERED" so that, if necessary, bench space can be re-allocated.

For each class you have entered find the area allocated to the class.

Fruit and vegetables should be arranged attractively either on a plate or directly on the table. Two specimens should be displayed side by side, for larger numbers the "roughly spherical" exhibits should usually be displayed in a symmetric circular arrangement while the longer cylindrical exhibits displayed in parallel rows.

Flowers should be placed in society vases. The staging area is outside the hall. Society vases and water will be provided. Stage the flowers in a suitably sized society vase. Any damaged leaves, buds and remaining immature side flowers should be removed and, if the flowers have been dry transported, about an inch of stalk will also need to be removed to assist water take up. Some additional shortening may well be necessary to position the flowers in a pleasing, symmetrical arrangement in the vase with all flowers facing forward and fully visible. It is customary to use crumpled newspaper in the water to hold the stems in the required positions.

If you are not sure how much space you can use or if you think there is insufficient space for your entry, contact a steward (or if you cannot find one the Show Secretary's desk) for guidance. Do NOT move or even touch another exhibitor's entry. Exhibits can only be moved by the exhibitor or if necessary by the Show Secretary or a steward.

If, as a result of comments from another exhibitor or self doubts, you have any reason to think that your entry is in the wrong class, contact a show steward or the Show Secretary for advice. If you are advised to change the class, you should be allocated a new entry card.

Before departing, tidy up immediately round your exhibit and check you have the correct number of specimens on display. Check that your entry and variety cards are alongside your entry and the entry card is upside down (so that your name is not visible). If you have smudged your entry card, request a replacement from the Show Secretary.