

Judging Criteria for Vegetable Exhibits

Marketable Size:

Issues of QUALITY

Select vegetables that have a deep, clear, intense color. Avoid dull colored specimens, or those that are too deeply colored because they may be overripe. Experience will help determine the best time to harvest a particular vegetable.

Many exhibitors believe that they need huge vegetables to have a winning vegetable entry. Although large size is important in a few classes – such as heaviest cabbage, largest pumpkin, or biggest watermelon, biggest zucchini– large size is not emphasized in most vegetable classes. Vegetables should be a size that will sell well on the open market. So, when deciding on what vegetables to exhibit at the fair, exhibitors should think in terms of the sizes most consumers want at the supermarket. Consumers generally prefer average-sized vegetables, not extremely large or small vegetables.

Trueness to Type or Shape:

Issues of QUALITY

All vegetables should be as true as possible to the type or shape of the variety. For example, an elongated beet is not typical of the cultivar “Detroit Dark Red” although some elongated beets may develop from “Detroit Dark Red” seed.

Maturity or Stage of Development:

Issues of Quality

Vegetables should be in prime condition for eating at the time of judging. In case of a late season or early fair, immature specimens are usually accepted. Judges generally use a higher set of standards for judging green tomatoes and other immature vegetables, such as winter squash, if both mature and immature specimens are exhibited in the same class.

Freshness:

Condition

Many vegetables are perishable, so measures should be taken to prevent shriveling. Vegetables that shrivel readily are young snap beans, beets, broccoli, carrots, celery, chard, Chinese cabbage, pickling cucumbers, endive, kohlrabi, lettuce, green onions, parsley, parsnip, radish, rhubarb, and spinach. These vegetables should be harvested as close to exhibit time as possible and refrigerated in plastic containers or other closed containers until shortly before exhibit time.

Cleanliness:

Condition

Vegetables should be clean and bright in appearance. Dirty vegetables indicate that the exhibitor was not interested in preparing an attractive, first-rate display. Sometimes vegetables can be cleaned by washing them, while in other cases, wiping them with a soft, clean cloth or brushing them lightly with a soft brush is sufficient.

Trimming:

Condition

Vegetables should be neatly and properly trimmed, much like market produce.

Insects and Diseases:

Freedom from Injury

All vegetables should be free of damage from insects and diseases.

Mechanical Injury:

Freedom from Injury

Injuries caused by weather or rough treatment during harvest downgrade an exhibit. There should be no root crops with injuries from digging or squash with stems torn off.

Transportation:

Freedom from Injury

To avoid any injury to exhibit vegetables when transporting them to the fair, exhibitors should pack the vegetables carefully in cloth or paper. They should place the wrapped vegetables in bushel baskets or boxes, using a lot of crumpled paper between layers. Exhibitors should also take along extra vegetables for each exhibit, in case something happens and the display vegetables are damaged in transport.

Size:

Uniformity

The size should be the size that is desirable on the market. The biggest vegetable is usually not the best for many vegetables, because it often indicates poor quality. The sizes of like vegetables should be similar, e.g., there should not be four large tomatoes and one small tomato on a plate. The ideal exhibit would have five medium-sized tomatoes. Also, exhibitors should try to arrange the tomatoes on the plate so the largest and smallest ones are not next to each other.

Shape:

Uniformity

Specimens should have the shape most typical of that vegetable variety.

Color:

Uniformity

Color should be uniform for all vegetables of a variety. Intense, deep colored specimens are usually preferred.

Maturity:

Uniformity

Vegetables exhibited should all be at the same stage of maturity.

Type:

Uniformity

Specimens should be typical of the type and variety. Labels indicating kinds and variety are desirable but not mandatory. When exhibiting unusual or non-typical types, it is recommended that the entry be labeled and described.

Entry Tips:

- 1. It is wise to harvest and bring extra specimens to registration in case of damage during preparation or transport.**
- 2. Exhibits must have the proper number of fruits or vegetables to be accepted; an insufficient number of specimens will disqualify or downgrade the entry.**
- 3. Do not place specimens in a sealed plastic bag as this causes the produce to sweat inside the bag, losing moisture.**
- 4. Do not leave specimens in a hot car for any period of time.**
- 5. Handle specimens carefully to avoid mechanical injury. A common source of mechanical damage is fingernail punctures to the ripe skin during picking or handling.**
- 6. When harvesting fruits and vegetables, do not twist the fruit or vegetable off of the plant as this damages the stem. Instead, use a sharp knife or scissors to cut the stem of the fruit or vegetable. Cut the stem longer than is specified in the Fair Book.**
- 7. Plates and bowls are provided for displaying exhibits; this is done so that all exhibits are consistently displayed.**
- 8. The Fair Book should be checked for any special rules concerning horticultural exhibits.**

References:

1. Wisconsin Cooperative Extension 4-H Program, Tips for County Fair Judges.
2. University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension, Exhibiting Vegetables, Fruits, Herbs & Field Crops – Baxter County Master Gardeners.
3. Utah State University Cooperative Extension, Vegetable Exhibits at Fairs and Shows, John Wesley and Maggie Wolf, 2008.

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