

Don't be afraid of showing

Harrow in LEAF's hints on showing



Have you ever been to a show and thought “mine are as good as that”? Well why not try your hand at entering our show? Even the experienced exhibitors started that way and it really isn't anything to be scared of. You don't need to have grown metre-long parsnips or leeks. Here are a few notes that might help or

encourage you, and if you want any further information we have people who can help (and indeed new exhibitors often get help with staging their exhibit at the show itself from experienced exhibitors). There are classes in the show for novices, but novices often win other classes too.

The **schedule** tells you what each class requires and also has some tips on presenting your exhibits. Do look at the number of specimens needed and the size if specified; if it says four scones or ten beans, no other number will do, and an onion that is heavier than the limit will also earn you a “not as schedule”. Judges use weighing scales and have a series of rings to check diameters, so it is essential to check these for your exhibits.

Here are a few hints, but if you have questions about other things, don't hesitate to contact us.

Vegetables and fruit are judged on uniformity (ie whether all the items in your exhibit are similar size, shape and colour), condition (not diseased or too blemished, and fresh rather than wizened, rubbery or wilted) and size (and bigger isn't necessarily better). For example, the longest beans may be knobbly and tough, and potatoes should be medium sized rather than giant bakers. You can put your exhibits on paper plates or doilies if you wish, but this isn't essential (except in the Cookery section, where exhibits should always be on plates). The stalk, if there is one, should always be left on fruit and vegetables.

Onions are best displayed on sand or rings—these could be plastic milk-bottle lids or sections of plastic pipe or toilet roll. Remove the loose papery outer onion layers, but stop before you get to the white fleshy layer. Wash potatoes, carrots, beetroots and parsnips gently with a sponge to avoid damaging the skin. If potatoes have coloured eyes they count as coloured not white. Beetroots should be no bigger than about tennis ball size. For cabbages, cut off the root but leave about 8 cm of stem and take off only the outermost leaves.



Don't trim off the base of rhubarb stems, but trim the leaf to 10–15 cm. Part of the



husks of sweetcorn should be opened up to show the kernels inside but leave the ‘silks’ intact. Ideally the kernels should go right up to the top of the cob. Flowers, if they are in good condition, can be left on courgettes. Don't polish fruit—leave the natural bloom on. Always try to handle fruit by the stalk.





In most **flower** classes vases are provided; the schedule will tell you if you need to bring your own. You can support the stems in the vase with crumpled newspaper or broken floral foam, but keep it below the rim. Cut off faded flowers and scruffy or diseased leaves. Individual Fuchsia flowers are usually exhibited by poking the flower stalk through foil or black cloth into water or floral foam. Pick flowers in the evening or early morning, and put them in a deep bucket of water away from light to stop the stems bending. Pick more than you need so you can choose the best specimens. Flowers should be a good shape and without blemishes on the petals. Damaged petals should be carefully removed. Roses should be about three-quarters open when picked.

For **pot plants**, remove damaged, diseased or dying flowers and leaves. Plant pot size is the inner diameter at the rim. Clean the outside of pots and remove debris from the surface of compost and preferably dress the surface of the pot with clean grit.

In the **Domestic section**, check whether a recipe or tin size is specified, and people have been caught out by the fact that dried fruit excludes candied peel and glacé cherries. Preserves must have a waxed disc on the surface and have a cellophane lid. These can be bought from many places, including Robert Dyas and John Lewis or on-line from Lakeland Plastics. The schedule gives details on jars and labelling for preserves, as well as some tips on making them.



For the **Honey, Mead and Beeswax** section, contact the Beekeepers directly: (07809 447 359; earlwebber@tiscali.co.uk).

Whatever you exhibit, take a spare specimen if you can—accidents do happen. And do count again the number of specimens you have actually exhibited.

You can get a show schedule or advice from the Harrow in LEAF Show Manager (020 8907 0508), who may also be able to put you in touch with a more experienced exhibitor who can answer specific questions. The *RHS Horticultural Show Handbook* has detailed advice. The Show Manager has a copy and will be able to answer questions. There are websites with some useful tips, such as <http://www.worthingallotments.co.uk/Page16.htm> http://www.whittinghamshow.co.uk/w_guide.htm#Links.

The first year show what you've grown; next year you may want to see which varieties won prizes and try to grow those next year. Eventually you may even start growing your carrots or parsnips in drain pipes just for the show, but most of us just want to grow things to eat or flowers to enjoy and put a few of the best specimens in the show.

Whether you exhibit vegetables, fruit, flowers or crafts—just have a go!