

JUDGING HORTICULTURAL PRODUCTS

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The eight classes of horticultural plants or produce to be judged will consist of:

- ◆ Two classes of fruits.
- ◆ Two classes of vegetables.
- ◆ Two classes of flowers and/or foliage plants.
- ◆ Two classes of ornamental plants.

Each class consists of four specimens of groups of specimens, lettered A, B, C, or D from left to right. Mentally arrange the specimens in order of highest to lowest overall quality and mark them in the appropriate space on the judging scoresheet in the column labeled "Placing."

JUDGING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Specific considerations on judging the 90 possible classes of fruits and vegetables is beyond the scope of this section of the contest manual. However, some general guidelines are presented to help you better recognize high quality fruits and vegetables and rank each class accordingly.

Judging fruits and vegetables is simply a matter of making choices. Consumers buy fruits and vegetables at the market by selecting those most appealing to them on the basis of external quality and past experience. Visit produce markets or produce sections of grocery stores to examine fruits and vegetables. Try to identify the best quality produce and determine why some produce is of inferior quality. Notice that almost everyone "selects" fruits and vegetables - they do not just take the first ones or closest ones. The key is learning, through experience, how to select the best produce.

Judging fruits and vegetables is based on common sense factors. They are judged as you see them, not by what they could be if properly trimmed, cleaned, etc. The following criteria should be used when evaluating the quality of produce:

- ◆ The cultivar of a specimen should be properly identified. For example, if you think you are purchasing a 'McIntosh' apple, you will probably not be satisfied with a 'Red Delicious' apple.
- ◆ Specimens should be fresh and at the optimum stage of maturity for eating. Produce that is overmature or immature is downgraded.
- ◆ Specimens should be clean and free from insects and diseases or any damage caused by such pests.
- ◆ Specimens should be free of bruises and blemishes. Although many surface blemishes do not affect eating quality, they do reduce eye appeal.
- ◆ Specimens on a plate should be uniform in size, shape, color and type. Each plate within a class will have the same number of specimens.
- ◆ Transplant specimens in pots should have only one plant/pot, and should not be overgrown so that they are root-bound (roots encircling the pot).

When grading, first visualize the ideal specimen. Then, consider all departures from this based on the above criteria and common sense. Factors affecting usefulness are downgraded more than other factors. For example, severely overripe bananas would be ranked below bananas with slight abnormalities in size or shape. The plate with the most defects and serious faults should receive the lowest ranking.

It is usually best to first identify the worst group (plate) within a class. Then, pick the best of the remaining three groups. Finally, try to place the middle two plates in rank order.

In our scoring scheme, the correct selection of the best group or specimen within a class is worth 76% of the total score for that class regardless of how the other three specimens/groups are ranked. By correctly placing the best and worst groups (specimens) within a class, the contestant earns 88% of the possible points for that class.

JUDGING FLOWERS AND FOLIAGE

Flowers are divided into two categories for judging purposes - cut flowers and pot plants. Cut flowers can be divided into two main shapes - spike and round. Gladiolus and snapdragon are examples of spike flowers. Rose and chrysanthemum are examples of round flowers.

When judging spike flowers, look for long spikes with half the florets open and half unopened. The bottom florets should show no signs of over-maturity in the form of browning around the edges, shriveling, or fading of color. Spike form flowers should be just single spikes with no secondary side shoots.

Maturity is an important factor when judging round form flowers. The center petals must not be so tight and immature as to be green, but they should be tighter than the outer petals. The outer petals should begin to turn down, but show no signs of wilting and drying.

Spike or round flowers in the same class should be of one variety or cultivar and have typical characteristics of that variety. Flowers are judged as you see them, not by what they could be if properly trimmed, cleaned, etc. Flowers should be free of irregularities, spray residue and blemishes due to insect, disease, or mechanical injury. Stems should all be the same length, straight and strong enough to support the flower head without bending. Foliage should be clean, fresh and a bright shade of green.

Size of bloom, symmetry, color, freshness, arrangement of petals and true-to-variety flower shape are other important points to consider when judging flowers.

Potted flowering plants should be short, compact, well-shaped plants having dark green foliage with flower buds just beginning to show color or perhaps with a few buds open. Specimens having the most flower buds are normally more desirable.

Judging foliage plants is similar to judging potted plants, but much more attention should be given to the quality of the foliage. The size, color and number of the leaves as well as the size and shape of the plant and whether it appears to be growing, are all criteria to consider.

JUDGING ORNAMENTALS

When judging ornamentals, look for a healthy, vigorous plant which is very well shaped, heavily branched and densely foliated. Specimens are judged as you see them, not by what their potential would be with proper pruning, cleaning, etc. Density and condition of the plant are more important qualities than the physical measurement or height. A shrub with a number of stocky, well-shaped branches is of better quality than one with long, thin branches. Factors that downgrade ornamental plants are:

1. Lack of health and vigor, or excessive succulence.
2. Canes or trunk(s) and branches:
 - a. Weak or poorly formed
 - b. Excessive scarring, scars not healed properly
 - c. Poor graft unions not healing properly
 - d. Branches poorly distributed
 - e. Dead wood
 - f. Cold damage
3. Foliage:
 - a. Leaves of improper shape, size, texture and color.
 - b. Excessive chlorosis (yellowing) due to mineral deficiency or other causes
 - c. Excessive pest or mechanical injury
 - d. Dead leaves

4. Root system:
 - a. Container grown stock
 1. Not well established in container.
 2. Excessively root bound.
 3. Large roots growing out of container.
 4. Weeds in container.
 - b. Balled and burlapped stock
 1. Loosely established in ball.
 2. Ball soft or loosely tied.
 3. Ball too small or shallow.
 4. Weeds growing around trunk.

