

Guidelines for the Exhibiting of Fruit, Vegetables and Flowers at Sutton Bonington Show

By 'having a go' at your local show you are participating in a great British tradition that has no equal anywhere else in the World. Sutton Bonington Horticultural Show has a growing reputation as one of the biggest and best quality shows in the area. It can be a serious business but should also be an enjoyable one and not daunting for first-time exhibitors. For this reason members of the committee will be on hand at the Show to help and advise. Why not have a go?.....winning isn't everything. Every entry helps to enhance the overall spectacle for the viewing public.

By following the tips below anyone can have a go. It's not rocket science but there have to be rules so that, at the end of the day, the judges can make a decisionand remember that the judges hate having to disqualify anyone! (Rules in Show schedule apply)

General: Do **not** be put off by thinking that 'biggest is best' and therefore bound to win. Condition, uniformity and shape are all equally important considerations. A nice set of evenly matched produce, of good size for the type has as much chance against a larger set that may be in poorer condition.

By all means enhance your exhibit with display aids to improve the overall effect for the benefit of the general public. But bear in mind that the judge will only compare veg against veg, fruit against fruit etc. The antique bowl you display your onions on will not sway the judge's opinion.

The judge will pick up and examine every single item in his quest to decide on the winner and will spot any minor imperfections.

All produce should be as clean and free from pest damage or disease as possible. If you wouldn't eat it then you shouldn't 'show' it (With the exception of the novelty classes!)

If you require any help/advice in the days leading up to the Show or would like a member of the HORT.SOC. committee to visit your garden for hands-on tips then please contact either Frank Clarke (672110) or Simon Smith (266898).

Fruit Section

4 Cooking apples of one kind

Should be large, shapely, solid fruits with eyes and stalks intact and clear unblemished skins of a colour characteristic of the variety shown. Stage on a paper plate with eyes uppermost.

4 Dessert apples of one kind

Select optimum sized shapely fruits with eyes and stalks intact and clear unblemished skins of the natural colour characteristic of the variety shown. Stage on paper plate with eyes uppermost.

4 Pears of one kind

Large (for the cultivar), shapely fruits with eyes and stalks intact and clear, unblemished skins of the natural colour characteristic of the variety shown. Arrange around a paper plate with stalks facing inwards.

6 Stone fruit of one kind – suggestions.....apricots/plums/cherries/damsons/peaches

Select large, ripe but firm fruits of good colour, carrying 'bloom' and with stalks intact. Stage on a paper plate

12 Blackberries or autumn raspberries

Select large ripe fruits of good colour with stalks. Stalks and calyces should look fresh. Stage around a paper plate all facing same way.

Any fruit not in another class minimum of 2 of one kind – suggestions.....Currants/grapes/melons/figs

Currants – Select large '*strigs*' with plenty of berries that are large, ripe and uniform on fresh stalks. Stage on a paper plate. Own foliage may be used for decoration.

Grapes - Should be large, symmetrical, complete *bunches*, properly thinned. Cut with a piece of lateral shoot on either side of the stalk to form a 'T' handle. Stage on a paper plate.

Figs – Select large, fully ripe fruits of good colour, with 'bloom' and stalks intact. Stage on a paper plate

Vegetable Section

3 Onions, trimmed, each less than 1 ½ lb

Select uniform, round bulbs that are nicely ripened, evenly shaped about the centreline and not lop-sided, with firm but thin necks. This means harvesting at least 4 weeks before the show date. Avoid over-skinning after lifting, trim roots to the base, cut foliage off leaving 3" of neck, wipe clean, dry and dust with talcum powder. Store each bulb in sheets of newspaper until show day. Before the show make your selection of the best 3 from the stored bulbs, wipe off the talcum powder, tie the necks with raffia or string and trim neck to about 1 ½". Display on dishes of dry sand or vermiculite. Make sure each bulb is less than 1 ½ lb. If not the dish will be disqualified.

3 Onions as grown, each over 1 ½ lb

Different from the 'trimmed' class in that they need to be staged as if lifted from the ground with all foliage and roots still intact. Take off any large clumps of soil and that's about it. But do choose 3 specimens that are as alike as possible showing no sign of pest damage. Feel the top of the bulb where the neck starts to make sure it isn't soft. If it is it could be a sign of neck rot and the judge will certainly spot it. In close competition it may be the difference between first and second place. Should be staged straight onto the showbench as they are. Make sure each onion is over 1 ½ lb.

6 Shallots trimmed

Should be well-ripened, evenly matched, solid, round bulbs with thin necks. Plant late December. Late April or as soon as the clumps start to split reduce to leave only 2 or 3 shoots. This gives them more room to grow on and develop into nice round bulbs. Harvest by mid-June, leaving on a wire rack under cover to dry (but out of direct sunlight). Cut off roots and trim necks to 1 ½". Store until Show time in boxes of sawdust. The day before the Show, make your final selection and carefully rub off the outer skin. The one underneath should be a nice, even, nut-brown colour. Tie necks with raffia and trim. At the show display on dishes of dry sand or vermiculite.

2 Leeks as grown (excl. pot leeks)

Need to be solid, long-shafted, well-blanching, tight-collared leeks with clean, blemish-free skins and no sign of bulbing at the base. Can be grown from seed but need a long growing season and extra heat and light. Alternatively, look in gardening press for top growers selling plants for despatch late Jan/early Feb. Pot on and plant in well-prepared beds in Spring. Blanching can be done by wrapping leek barrel in collars made from cardboard or damp-proof coarse material. Extend length of collar as leek grows. A cane may be needed to support the leek. Day before show lift your chosen specimens. Avoid excessive stripping of the outer leaves which can expose ribbing and wash roots carefully to remove all soil. Stage straight onto showbench side-by-side with roots facing forward.

2 Long carrots

Should be long, tapering roots of good shape, colour and size, free from side roots and not green around the crown. Try and extract as much of the root intact as possible. Should be free of all dirt by carefully washing around (not up and down) with a soft sponge in plenty of water. Foliage should be trimmed to 3" and they should be staged flat on the bench side-by-side. The best roots are grown above ground in drums of sand or pipes. If you would like to have a go at this method have a word with a committee member early in the year.

3 Stump rooted carrots

Qualities generally as required for long carrots. This type is more likely to be successfully grown 'in the ground'. Choose a Nantes or Favourite type which grows to approx. 6-10" long with a distinct 'stump end' before the longer, thread-like tap root. Make sure you pull soil over the crown regularly to ensure the shoulder doesn't turn green. The day before the Show go along the row selecting roots that have shoulders the same size. Clear away soil from around the top of the root, pour in water and wait for it to drain away. Pull the root slowly and carefully trying to get up as much of the root intact as possible. Match roots to give your final set and wash under water with a soft sponge to remove all dirt. Wash 'around' the root not up and down which can cause scratching. Trim foliage to 3" and stage at the Show straight onto the bench side-by-side.

3 Beetroot

The day before the Show select uniform, round beetroot no larger than the size of a tennis ball, with a long, central tap-root. Wash with the soft side of a scouring pad under water to remove all trace of soil. If there is corkiness around the shoulder the rough side of a scouring pad can be used to carefully rub it away. Practice on a 'reject' first!!! Remove any dead or yellowing leaves but retain all other foliage. Can be stored over night in buckets of water to which has been added a dash of vinegar. This brings out the internal colouring...the judge will cut one of your roots at the Show to check for this and to make sure there are no rings indicating that it has been watered irregularly during growth. Wash under a tap before the Show to remove the vinegar smell! Stage on paper plates, or straight onto the bench with tap-roots facing forwards.

2 Parsnips

Should be long tapering roots, well-shouldered with smooth white skins and free from side roots and blemish such as canker. Foliage should be trimmed to approx. 3". Stage straight onto the showbench side by side. As with long carrots the best ones are grown in drums of sand or pipes.

4 Coloured potatoes

Select equally matched, medium sized tubers (about 6-8oz) with shallow eyes. Should be well cleaned and free from skin blemishes. Stage on a paper plate with the 'rose' end facing outwards. Bear in mind that potato varieties such as 'Kestrel' that are predominantly white but have coloured speckles or splashes are classed as 'coloured'.

4 White potatoes

Attributes as for coloured potatoes. To add to the confusion, cream coloured spuds or those with slightly yellow skins are classed as 'white' potatoes ! If in doubt ask a committee member at the Show.

One Cabbage

Doesn't have to be huge! Select one with good shape and a fresh, solid heart. Retain surrounding leaves intact with 'bloom' but discard the outer yellowing ones. Should be as blemish free as possible. Cut with approx 3" of stalk and stage with head facing forwards. And check for any stowaway slugs!

6 French & 6 Runner beans

Select straight, tender pods of even length (ideally 6-8" for French beans and 12-18" for runners) and good colour with no sign of seeds showing. Exhibit with some stalk showing, all flat onto the show bench, or on pieces of purpose made board painted black, side by side and all facing the same way in order to highlight their uniformity.

5 Tomatoes

Should be well-matched, firm, round (approx 65mm diameter), richly-coloured and well-ripened fruits but not over-ripe. The green calyces should be retained to ½" or so past the 'knuckle'. Display on plain paper plates with calyx uppermost. Parsley garnishing is optional but not essential.

Cracks on the upper part of the skins caused by bright sunlight or 'ghost spots' caused by splashes of water are deemed to be faults so take care during the growing process. 'Flat' sides caused by resting against other fruits on heavily laden trusses are another 'fault'. Judicious thinning at the flowering stage can remedy this.

12 'Cherry' tomatoes

Fresh, ripe but firm, well-coloured fruits not exceeding 35mm in diameter, with fresh calyces attached. Can be attractively staged on plates of dry sand to stop them rolling about.

2 Peppers

Select fresh, brightly coloured matching fruits with at least 1" of stalk. Stage on paper plates.

One Cucumber

Select fresh, young, green, straight fruits of uniform thickness with a short 'handle' and about 1" of stalk. Preferably the flower should still be attached. Try not to handle too much as this spoils the natural waxy bloom. During growth the plant's own coarse foliage can scratch the fruits (leading to downpointing on the showbench) so try to protect them by shielding them with cotton wool or small sheets of polystyrene. Stage straight onto the showbench as they are.

One flower, one fruit, one vegetable

This is the class to show your best single fruit, best single veg and best single flower. For Horticultural Show purposes **remember** that tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers etc are classed as vegetables despite being technically (and botanically) fruits. For instance, to display a dahlia, a carrot and a tomato would mean you would be disqualified as having displayed 2 vegetables. Seems tough but those are the rules!

Also, vegetables like onions, long carrots, tomatoes, parsnips, potatoes, leeks and caulis are what are termed '20 pointers' (cucumbers/runner beans and stump carrots are 18 pointers) and are more likely to beat (assuming they are well grown) the lesser pointed veg such as courgettes (10), marrows (15), peppers (15), cherry tomatoes (12), french beans (15) and beetroot (15).

Similarly, dahlias, chrysanthus and gladioli will usually beat sunflowers, other annuals and half-hardy perennials such as rudbeckias, as they are deemed harder to grow to perfection. It would be very difficult for a courgette, plum and Michaelmas daisy to beat a carrot, apple and dahlia however well they had been grown.....but not impossible!

Any other vegetable (minimum of two)

This is the class for any vegetable not listed in the main section and there is a wide choice. But remember that certain vegetables are deemed harder to grow than others and may be more worthwhile. Try pot leeks (20 points), cauliflowers (20), aubergines (18), trench celery (20) or peas (20). Lower pointed veg such as broad beans (15), brussels (15), lettuce (15), marrows and squashes (15), sweetcorn (15) or turnips (15) are worth trying but would have to be grown really well. Other types such as courgettes (10), garlic (12), kohlrabi (12), radishes (10) or pumpkins (10) would probably only be making up the numbers! However, in the past few years squashes, courgettes and sweetcorn have been known to win this class.

Meritorious qualities for all these veg are the same.....uniformity of size and shape, freshness, colour and tenderness and being free of blemish from pest or disease.

Cauliflowers-cut with approx 3" of stalk, with solid white curds free from stain or frothiness. Cut back outer leaves level with curd.

Marrows-young, tender, uniform fruits no longer than 15", preferably with flower still attached. Wipe clean.

Sweetcorn-fresh, cylindrical cobs with fresh green husks, intact silks and up to 1" of stalk. Grains well set up to the tip in straight rows and milky when pierced. Pull down husks and tuck neatly under the cob.

Trug of vegetables

This class is all about the variety and quality of the produce and the presentation of it. The more different types of veg that you can pack in and the more attractive you can display it the better. Try scrunching up newspaper to pack the veg upwards (helps cut down on the weight also) but make sure you hide the newspaper through the gaps by using something like curly parsley. This is the one class where the judge will NOT handle each single vegetable (otherwise he would spoil your design) so that little bit of pest damage on the underside of an otherwise perfect spud can be hidden!

Flower Section

3 Rose blooms of one kind

Blooms that are fresh, free from any blemish, in their most perfect phase, half to $\frac{3}{4}$ open, with well formed centres. Petals should be of good substance, regularly and gracefully arranged within a circular outline when viewed from above. Colour bright and brilliant. Foliage should be of good size and texture and free from any signs of pest or disease. Stage in an appropriate sized Society vase packed in oasis or paper, with one bloom set slightly higher and in the 'back' middle of the lower two.

Three stages of same rose

Make sure you pick 3 stems of the same rose, (can be from different bushes). One should be in tight bud but with some colour showing, possibly with one or two petals beginning to 'unfurl'. One bloom should be in the 'perfect' phase, $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ open. One bloom should be in 'full bloom' stage with the petals symmetrically arranged within a circular outline. Stamens, if exposed, should be fresh and of good colour. Well formed stems and foliage, free from blemish.

Dahlias general

Should be fully open according to type but showing no sign of an open (daisy-eyed) centre (apart from the collerette types which are naturally like this). Display evenly matched, firm and blemish-free blooms, all florets intact with about 15-18 inches of solid, straight stalk. Bloom should be held at an angle not less than 45 degrees to the main stem. Should be attractively staged in Society vases with oasis or paper so that they do not touch each other, and all facing the same way. Be sure to nip out any immature flower buds in the leaf joints as these count as a bloom and would lead to disqualification. If a bloom is in perfect condition before the Show it can be picked up to 2 days before and stored in a cool, shady place such as a garage. Any florets that have been nibbled by earwigs can be carefully nipped out and the neighbouring florets 'dressed' to hide the gap.

3 Pompom dahlias of one kind

Main thing to remember....these blooms must pass through a 2" 'dahlia ring'. If not you will be disqualified. And remember that if you don't quite pick them at their optimum size they can take up water in the vase and actually grow in size. So they might be under 2" when you pick them but by the time the judge comes to look at them they may be over the limit. Should be fully open to the rear where the bloom meets the stalk but not have an open, 'daisy eyed' centre.

3 Dahlias of one kind under 6" dia.

Need to be larger than 2" but able to pass through a 6" 'dahlia ring'. Most ball types, small cactus and collerette dahlias will be suitable for this class.

3 Dahlias of one kind over 6" dia.

All blooms must not be able to pass through a 6" ring. The larger the bloom the more difficult to grow and match up.

Any other cut flower - three of one kind

Sky's the limit as far as choice but remember to choose 3 identical blooms in as perfect a condition as possible, free from damage due to weather, pest or disease.

Chrysanthemums- as for dahlias except that blooms should be held at 90degrees to the stem. Foliage should be in good condition and retained on the stem.

Sweet peas- strong spikes with well-spaced blooms, the top ones being well expanded and the bottom ones still fresh.

Large flowers with erect standards and rigid wings free from spotting or scorching, of a bright colour with a silken sheen.

5 Pansies or violas

Matching flowers that are fresh, clean, circular in outline, with smooth, thick, velvety petals lying evenly on each other, and either flat or slightly reflexed so that the surface of the flower is slightly convex. Blotches (faces) to be clearly defined and harmonious. Preferably staged flat on specially made boards with holes to pass the stem through into a water reservoir beneath or else arranged neatly around the edge of a small vase so that the judge may easily assess the relative merits.

3 Gladioli spikes

Should be nice, straight 'spikes' ideally showing at least 1/3 fully-open unblemished florets, 1/3 buds showing colour, 1/3 tight, unopened buds. Open flowers should be of good form, texture and colour and be regularly spaced either side of the main stem so as to hide the stem completely. Lowest floret should be fresh but if faded should be cut off completely. As with dahlias, nip out any immature side shoots showing flower buds. Stage 3 in a vase in a fan-shape.

One Flowering pot plant – suggestions.....pelargoniums/streptocarpus/gloxinias/carnations/begonias

A sturdy, shapely plant, well furnished with healthy, unblemished foliage and displaying a good number of flowers or coloured bracts of good size, colour and substance. The degree of skill required to produce certain plants to perfection will also be taken into consideration. No sign of pest damage or disease. Pots should be clean and undamaged.

One Pot plant cactus or succulent

A large specimen for the species or form is preferred, that is well-balanced, in good health, free from injury of any sort including damaged spines or defective 'bloom'. A plant in flower preferred to one that is not, and a species that is rare in cultivation will be preferred to one that is common, all other attributes being equal.

One Foliage pot plant

Judges will be looking for a well balanced, sturdy & shapely plant, well furnished with clean, unblemished, healthy foliage. Make sure you 'dress' the plant by removing any yellowing, decayed or pest damaged leaves. The degree of skill required to produce certain plants to perfection will also be taken into consideration. Pots should be clean and undamaged.

One Fuchsia plant

Should be a vigorous, symmetrical, floriferous plant well furnished with clean foliage and plenty of fresh blooms of good colour. Supports and/or ties should be unobtrusive. No sign of pest damage or disease. A wipe of the plant pot to remove any soil splashes can also enhance the visual appeal.

6 Fuchsia flowers on a board

At least 2 cultivars required. Ensure each bloom is as unblemished as possible, size typical for the cultivars(s). Where more than one bloom of the same cultivar is shown make sure they are as alike as possible. Flowers should be at the 'perfect' open stage, with 4 sepals, carrying just enough pollen on the stigmas. (N.B. a fuchsia bloom lasts about 10 days from opening, and pollen 'breaks' after the 5th day). Cut flowers as close to the show as possible and with a pedicel (flower stalk) that is long enough to take up water in the reservoir beneath the display boards. 'Boards' will be set up ready on the show bench by the Society.....just insert your flowers into the holes.

Vase or bowl of cut flowers

Should be exactly that..... a vase of cut flowers! If you include extra foliage (other than the foliage on the actual flower stalks) you are likely to be disqualified. Society vases are available or you may chose to use your own. Select nice fresh flowers at their optimum of perfection and display in the vase to give a nicely balanced effect that is pleasant to view from all sides. Colour co-ordinated displays will often win the day against a mixed vase of clashing colours. And a vase of several different flower types will also be judged more favourably than a vase showing only one or two types.

Collection of 5 bunches of herbs (named) in a vase

Pick only fresh, healthy, clean leaves. Carefully snip off any leaves that are yellowing or showing signs of pest damage and disease. Arrange in 5 distinct bunches in a vase. Keep as simple as possible.

Remember 1) that a vase is defined as having a greater height than the width measurement of its mouth and 2) that you must attach a label of some description clearly naming the herbs you have exhibited. Failure to comply with these two points would result in your exhibit being disqualified and marked NAS (not as schedule).

And finally:

- Make sure you leave yourself plenty of time to stage your entries. Judging MUST start at the specified time and when you're rushing mistakes will happen. The earlier you can get there the easier it is for the Committee also.
- Think about how you transport your produce to the Show. It would be very frustrating for it to be spoiled during careless transportation after all your months of hard work.
- Make sure you put the correct number of items in each class. Put in 4 tomatoes or 6 instead of the required 5 and you will be disqualified.
- Ensure all flower vases are topped up with water. Barrels of water will be available in the tent.
- Make sure you enter your exhibits with the stewards and that you stick one of the numbered labels on each and every entry. Unlabelled exhibits will not be eligible for judging.
- If you have time and you know the variety of your exhibit by all means attach a label stating what it is e.g. Tomato 'Shirley'. It not only adds to the interest value for the viewing public but may (just may!) sway the judges opinion if he cannot quite decide between 2 seemingly equal exhibits.
- And if upon your return to the Show after judging you find that you have won a prize then well done! But if you haven't then don't despair.....ask one of the Committee for reasons why you might not have won and vow to do even better next year!

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