



# *Harvesting and Preparing Fair Entries*

7/14/2024





- Suggestions for Fair entries
- Harvesting and preparing vegetables for entry
- What judge looks for
- Preparing herbs & flowers

# Ideas for Entries



# When to Harvest Vegetables

Harvest when the vegetable reaches peak edibility



Small enough to be tender but mature enough to have good flavor.

Over mature; seeds are hard and chewy, and the flesh may be bitter. Super-big zucchini are scored lower than zucchini at peak edibility.



# Harvesting/Preparing Vegetables & Fruits

- Use a sharp knife to make clean cut; (pulling from vine may result in a jagged tear on the stem)
- Should be fresh & in prime condition at the time of judging
- Harvest as close to the exhibition date as possible to prevent wilting and shriveling (except onions and sweet potatoes)
- If vegetables harvested >1 day before the fair, store them in plastic bags in the refrigerator
- All vegetables should be true-to-type, that is, typical of the crop and variety being exhibited, e.g. cucumbers with curled ends are not true-to type
- Pack vegetables carefully in cloth or paper when transporting

# Cleaning Root Crops

- Root crops, such as potatoes, that have been washed and scrubbed will wilt and shrivel after only a short time on display.
- Generally, less soil adheres to root vegetables if they are dug when the soil is relatively dry.
- If washing is necessary, soak roots in cool water, and gently wash with a stream of water or soft cloth. Never scrub with a hard-bristled brush.



# Cleaning Tender-skinned Crops

- Tender-skinned vegetables, such as summer squash and eggplant, must not be washed.
- Clean them by lightly brushing the dirt away with a soft-bristled paint brush.



# What the Judge Looks for on Vegetables & Fruits



- As closely alike as possible in color, shape and size
- Free of soil, blemishes, bruises and unscarred by garden pests, disease, rough handling, or careless cultivation
- Normal-sized vegetables that are ready to be consumed or cooked, at their best and most flavorful
- Look like what is typically found at grocery stores (not largest or smallest)
- Correct number of vegetables of high quality on plate (see Fair Book)



# Preparing Herb Leaves



- Remove leaves below the water line so they do not rot.
- Leaves should be fresh and have no blemishes, bruises, or insect and disease damage. If necessary, rinse very gently in cool water.
- When more than one stem is required, trim stems evenly, and select for uniform size.
- After herbs flower, the essential oils change, affecting the flavor or scent.
- Many herbs are best harvested and exhibited before they flower; to prevent early blossoming, keep the plant pruned.

# Herbs

Think about entering

- Herb Flowers
- Fresh herb leaves
- Dried herbs

# Preparing Herb Flowers

- Blossoms should be fresh, of uniform color and development, have no soil on them, and have no insect or disease damage.
- Harvest just as they reach full flower.
- Remove leaves below the water line so they do not rot.



# Preparing Dried Herbs



- Harvest herbs for drying when they contain the maximum amount of essential oils, which provide the flavor and scent. For leafy herbs, this is usually when the flower bud just begins to open.
- Harvest seed heads when they change from green to brown but before they drop.
- Rinse gently if needed and pick off dead or discolored leaves.
- To dry herbs on the stem, gently remove the leaves and/or flowers after drying. Or, if you use a screen, you can remove the leaves and flowers before drying.

# Harvesting Flowers



- Cut flowers in the evening or early morning.
- Cut the stem several inches longer than necessary to allow for later trimming.
- Use a clean, sharp knife; scissors tend to pinch the ends of the stems and close off the water-conducting vessels; blocked stems are unable to supply needed water to the living flower and will make the exhibit deteriorate more rapidly.
- Remove leaves that will be in water.

# Condition Flowers for Longer Life

- “Conditioning” or “hardening” reduces chances of stem blockage and promotes quick water uptake. *Take a container of lukewarm water (100° to 110°F) to the garden.*
- Immediately after cutting, place the stems in the water.
- Place the container & flowers in a refrigerator set at 35° to 40°F for 3 to 12 hours. Cooling permits the plant to take up more water than it releases and helps hold flower freshness. Never store flowers in a refrigerator with fresh fruits or vegetables; they release ethylene gas, which will reduce the vase life of the flowers.



# Round-form Flowers

- Cut when fully developed as indicated by the outer petals folding out gracefully. At this stage the center petals are tighter than the outer petals but are not an immature green.
- Avoid exhibiting overly mature flowers where the center is visible or any outer petals have begun to shrivel, fade, or curl.
- Pick roses when the bud is first starting to open; the flower will open throughout the day.



Ex: aster, standard chrysanthemum like football or spider, cosmos, dahlia, daisy, dianthus, marigold, peony, annual phlox, rose, and zinnia

# Spike-form Flowers

- Cut when the bottom florets are open and in perfect condition. The ideal choice has about one-third of the florets fully open, about one-third showing color as buds, and about one-third that are still green.
- All florets should still be present and in good condition (not shriveled); none should have browned petal edges or faded color.
- The spike should be straight to the tip, and the stem should be sturdy.



Ex: celosia, delphinium,  
gladiolus, salvia, and  
snapdragon



# Spray-form Flowers

- A spray is a single main stem with blooms on side branches. Judges look at the number of buds, the branching and vigor of the spray, as well as the quality of individual flowers.
- Daylilies and lilies should be exhibited with as many open flowers as possible. Each petal on every flower should be in good condition, not wilted, shriveled, or bruised. Avoid overly mature flowers. Pick when the bud is just starting to open.



*Ex: ageratum, pompon and decorative type chrysanthemum, daylily, lily, and sweet pea*

# References

- Oregon State Extension
- Penn State Extension
- Iowa State Extension
- University of Nebraska Extension