

A guide to showing Vegetables, Flowers & Fruit

Our show is for everyone to have fun showing their best produce and these notes are a guide to help make the most of your efforts.

General Points

- **Read the show rules in the Schedule carefully.** Display the correct number of items for the chosen class. If you need help on presentation then stewards are available on Show Day to help.
- Produce for exhibiting should be fresh, tender and ideal for the kitchen. ‘Appropriate’ size for the item is the key thing.
- Where a number of vegetables or fruits are to be exhibited in a particular class, each item should, as far as possible, be of the same size and quality. Uniformity is probably the most important aspect in shows such as ours: exhibit the best uniform group available rather than one or two excellent vegetables or fruit with the rest of the group made up of ill-matched ones.
- Produce should be free of pests and disease and, as far as possible, free of slug damage.
- Presentation is also an important aspect: each entry should be neatly displayed on the show bench. Don’t polish any of the exhibits with oils of any sort. Don’t forget to include your exhibitor card: check it has been correctly filled in and placed, face down, with the right exhibit in the right class.
- Try to avoid vigorous patterns on plates (paper plates are ideal).

VEGETABLES

Runner and Dwarf Beans

Show straight and tender pods with no outward signs of seeds or stringiness. Tenderness is all-important. Cut from plant with scissors leaving a short stalk. Display the beans laid neatly side by side on the bench with the stalks all facing in the same direction. Pick the beans in the morning and keep wrapped in a damp cloth. The judge will snap a bean in half to judge its freshness.

Beetroot

Show medium sized beets with smooth clear skins and flesh of a dark uniform colour. (Select one or two extra roots and cut them open to check the flesh quality yourself (don’t exhibit these!). Trim foliage to 3” and carefully wash the roots (don’t cut the thin root off) – don’t scrub the beetroots. Pat dry with a soft cloth.

Carrots

Show tender uniformly shaped roots with brightly coloured clear skins. Black or green colouring at the top of the root (crown) should be avoided. Remove the carrot gently from the earth, leaving on the foliage and as much of the main root on as possible. With the carrot submerged in water use a soft sponge and gently wipe round, not up and down, to clean off any earth. Pick fine roots off with the fingers and use a soft toothbrush to clean the crown. Wrap them in wet tissue or cloths and keep them out of the light. Before displaying, trim the foliage to 3”. (Carrots with no foliage will be disqualified).

Onions: Large and up to 3”

Show firm, well ripened bulbs with thin necks. *(To avoid showing ‘green’ i.e. unripe onions, about 4 weeks before the show lift the onions, clean carefully. A few broken outer skins may be peeled away, but do not peel excessively. Be careful not to damage the bulb. Leave to ripen.)* Trim tops to leave about 2” then fold over and bind with fine string, raffia or wool. Trim roots at the base of the bulb to neaten. Onions may be displayed standing on short collars cut from cardboard tube, or on sand on a plate.

Lettuce

Show firm tender unbroken hearts of good colour which show no signs of bolting. Outer leaves should not be limp or pale in colour. Brush off any earth with a soft brush. Keep the lettuces in water until you are ready to display them, then cut off the root just before putting them on the bench.

Potatoes

Show medium sized, well shaped tubers. Skins should be clear and free of scab, speckled patches, etc. Wash carefully with a sponge, don’t scrub or break the skin. Uniformity is important here. They may be staged on a plate.

Tomatoes

Show well shaped, firm richly coloured, uniform sized fruits with green stalk (calyx) still attached. Avoid green colouring of fruit around the stalk (green-back). If possible, pick on the morning of the show for absolute freshness. Handle carefully to retain natural ‘bloom’ on the fruit. Don’t wash them. Fruits may be displayed on a plate with the calyx uppermost. Handle as little as possible. Truss of Tomatoes: Show a truss with all tomatoes present. Can be green.

Marrow

Show a pair matched in size, age, tenderness and colour. Wipe clean if necessary.

Courgettes

Cut off the bush with a sharp knife leaving a short stem on the fruit. Match in size, age, tenderness and colour, with no scratches or other blemishes. If the flowers are still attached, so much the better (*this can indicate top freshness*). Wipe clean gently if necessary.

Sweetcorn

Show cobs matched in size and age if possible. Leave them in their husks with beards intact - remove as few outer leaves as possible.

Rhubarb

Pull the stalks and show straight and tender stalks with no marks. Match for size and age. Trim leaves to about 3". Don't cut the bottom off.

FRUIT

Soft fruit

Show ripe fruits with the calyx and stalks left on: cut them off the bush with sharp scissors. To maintain their natural bloom, handle as little as possible.

Apples, etc.

Choose regular, uniformly shaped fruits free from blemishes and obvious inhabitants! Keep a leaf when picking, if possible. Fruit should be handled as little as possible in an effort to preserve the natural 'bloom'. So - no washing or polishing. Display on a plate or other suitable receptacle.

FLOWERS

- In general flowers will be judged on the quality of bloom, stems and foliage.
- A good bloom will be of good form for the plant and free from water marks, and insect, fungal or other damage. Look at your flowers from above, below and from the sides when comparing blooms.
- Pick leaving the stems as long as possible. They can always be shortened later.
- **Vases:** Exhibition vases of different sizes are provided by the Society for exhibitors to use on the day.
- Bring some newspaper or oasis to help with presentation – wet the paper and pack it in the vase to keep the stems in the position you want them.

Dahlias

These are a special case in our flower show: the varieties of blooms (cactus, pompon, semi-cactus etc) must conform to certain shapes and sizes, e.g. pompons must be less than 5cm in diameter. Form of the flower, the centre, condition, stem, foliage and colour all count towards a winning bloom.

In the *I'm no Expert* class varieties are not important, but all other criteria still count.

Roses

These are always judged first because they need to be fresh, free from blemishes and just over half open. Cut them at the last minute. If you are showing one bloom then remove side buds.

Gladiolus

A good stem will have flowers hiding the stem. The bottom flower will be in full bloom, a third of the stem in full flower, a third with buds showing colour and the top third in green buds. You can hold the flowers back by putting the stems in a dark cupboard.

Pot plants - flowers

Judges will be looking for lots of flowers all round the plant so at least a month before the show start rotating your pot on a weekly basis. Watch out for bugs and splash marks. Foliage is as important as the flowers.

Pot plants - foliage

Judges will be looking for good all round growth. Watch out for bugs and splash marks.

If you are interested in more detailed information on "showing" you can refer to the Royal Horticultural Society Handbook. The Show Secretary will have a copy for reference (this is not available for loan). If you want your own copy it is available for purchase from the RHS website shop, "The RHS Show Handbook, (2008) £7.95, ISBN 9781902896830.

NOTE: Although our Show is judged based on RHS or Dahlia Society rules (the judges must have some sort of benchmark!) the RHS handbook is not essential reading for exhibitors at the Cholsey Flower Show. Have fun, whatever you show – and good luck!