

OLD BASING AND LYCHPIT VILLAGE SHOW

A Rough guide to showing Vegetables

The basic rules

Look at what the schedule is asking for.

- Check that the number of items you have put on the bench is what the schedule is asking for, that's the first thing a judge will do.
- Check your entry for size and/or weight. This is particularly important where weight is stipulated (e.g. onions not more than 250 grams or pickling shallots where there is a size limit) or if there is a length restriction (courgettes). This is the second thing that the judges will check.
- If the schedule says any amount up to a maximum of 3 it means just that – it does not mean you have to put in 3. The key is to ensure the items that you put in are matched – it is much more difficult to match 3 than to match a pair and if you can't do that, just enter one – sometimes, one good single entry is more likely to catch the judge's eye than unmatched entries. However, be aware of the visual impact. It's fine to put one excellent cabbage on the bench but one radish or one small parsnip won't score too well!
- Give yourself plenty of time to a) prepare your entries and b) stage them on the morning of the show. And think about how you are going to display them – just plonking them on the bench is not going to help what could potentially be a winning entry!

How items are judged

We can't describe the judging rules for every vegetable. If you need to know, ask a committee member. However, there are some general points to remember:

- If there's a size, weight or quantity specified and your exhibit does not comply with the scheduled, the judges will mark it as "NAS" (not according to schedule) and the item will not be judged. It sounds harsh but don't be put off! Even seasoned exhibitors get it wrong sometimes.
- Exhibits are judged on condition including ripeness, uniformity, size, shape and colour, usually in that order.

Is it fruit or vegetable?

- The RHS Show handbook classifies vegetables as a plant (or part of a plant) that is grown in a kitchen garden, eaten cooked or uncooked but not usually as a pudding or dessert. Hence aubergines, cucumbers, squashes and tomatoes (to name but a few) are classified for show purposes as vegetables, even though botanically speaking, they are fruits. If in doubt, as a committee member.

Tips on showing

Here are a few tips on showing some vegetables – just remember you will lose points if your entry has blemishes or imperfections and, unless size or weight is specifically mentioned in the schedule, a smaller more perfect entry will in most cases triumph over a larger more imperfect one. Not every vegetable that is listed in the schedule is mentioned here.

Beans - runner

When picking try to keep the stalks on. You need to select a set of matching beans that are straight and the same size in length. The judges will always select the bean they believe to be the stringiest and break it to prove it is so it is a good idea to try and pick beans that may be slightly smaller but less likely to be stringy. **TIP:** Beans can be partly straightened by wrapping them tightly in a damp tea towel against a straight solid object and keeping them in the fridge overnight!

Beans – French/Dwarf

Again the same rules apply as runner beans but it is easier to produce a matched set in this class so the judge will pay particular attention to sets that are the same size, length and colour.

Beetroot

Gently wash them and remove any dirt, tidy up and remove dead or dying foliage and tie leaf stalks together with raffia about 4 cms from base – remove excess foliage about 3 cms from where you have tied them.

Make sure you keep the roots intact and trim of any hairs.

Carrots and Parsnips

Care needs to be taken when pulling both carrots and parsnips to ensure that the full extent of the root is withdrawn from the ground. The root needs to be gently cleaned with a soft brush under running water. Clean around the base of the leaves and remove any dead or damaged foliage – tie in the same way as beetroots. Additionally, if the root is hairy (i.e. the root has fibrous roots coming off the main root) these should be gently rubbed off.

Just remember that long carrots are exactly the same shape as parsnips (wide shoulders tapering down to nothing) and other carrots have a definite stump (some do taper slightly but not continuously)

Courgettes and Marrows

Marrows normally are entered in the “any other vegetable” class. It is quite difficult to match a pair of marrows so a single entry may be your best bet.

Courgettes have their own class and are always displayed as a matched pair and as a consequence care needs to be taken to ensure that your entry not only matches in size but in shape as well – again check size restrictions. Displaying with the flower still attached is desirable but not always possible so don't worry if they fall off – just remember if one comes off remove the flower off the other one!

Cucumbers

There are two types of cucumber – the ridge (outdoor) and the greenhouse variety. As there is only one class you often see both types competing against each other – the greenhouse variety is much harder to grow and will therefore attract more points than an outdoor variety. Whichever one you are entering the cucumbers should be blemish free, a good shape and if more than one is needed then they should match.

Onions

As with all vegetables that are being exhibited onions should be the same size and shape and have a good clean external skin. Care should be taken not to strip back the bulb too much otherwise you run the risk of exposing the fleshy inner layers which will lose you points. To display trim off the dried roots and wipe bulb with a damp cloth, fold the dried neck of the bulb over and neatly tie with raffia, trim off any excess neck. Sit on a slice of plastic piping or something similar or a plate of sand.

Potatoes

Clean carefully with a soft brush – your potatoes should be no bigger than the palm of your hand and no smaller than a large egg. Each potato should be blemish free and match its companions in both shape and size. Eyes should be few and shallow. Some potato varieties are better suited to exhibition than others so this is something you will want to consider at the start of the season.

Shallots

The rules for shallots are the same as onions only you need more of them and they are a lot more fiddly to prepare. Shallots have a hard basal plate which should be trimmed back and have less dry layers than onions so be very careful before you start removing the dried outer layers. Again, fold and tie the necks with fine raffia and sit on fine dried sand. Extra care is required for the smaller pickling shallots – these are even more difficult to handle but the preparation is the same as their bigger cousins. This class can easily catch you out for going over size – use a measuring ring to check the diameter as anything else will not give you an accurate reading.

Sweetcorn

Sweetcorn needs to be ripe when exhibited and it is important to ensure you display the husk (the outer green protective leaves) as well as the grains. To do this you need to pull down and remove at least a quarter of the leaves of the husk to expose the grains – the judge may remove more to check that the grains are uniform and undamaged.

Tomatoes

Always display with the calyx intact (that's the green spidery bit on top) – this also gives the judge an indication of how fresh the tomato is. The calyx should be green with little or no sign of browning.

Each tomato should be blemish free and of equal size and shape. Best displayed on a dish of fine dried sand.

Tomatoes - Cherry

Same instruction as with Tomatoes above. Cherry tomatoes can have a tendency to split when ripe so it is advisable not to pick too far in advance of the show.

And Finally

If the vegetable that you are entering is not listed above and you need advice, or if you need any further information about the vegetables listed above, please contact a committee member.