

The following information is taken from the RHS Horticultural Show Handbook.

The preparation and presentation of fruit

Picking Pick as near to show time as possible, taking care not to damage fruit. Harvest currants, jostaberries and worcesterberries with the strigs intact, choosing the longest strigs with the largest fruits. Pick grapes as a complete bunch and cut each bunch with a piece of lateral shoot on either side of the stalk to form a T-handle. Pick apricots, nectarines and peaches, blueberries and citrus fruits without any attached stalk and stem. Take care not to split the skin in the stalk cavity. Show all other fruits with the stalks fresh and intact. Handle all fruits as little and gently as possible and by their stalks, if possible, so that the natural bloom is not spoilt. Use scissors to remove soft fruits. Under no circumstances should fruit be polished.

Selection Choose only fruits as near to perfection as possible. The fruits should be fresh, uniform, free from blemish and characteristic in shape and colour. Refer to the show schedule to see what is required but pick more than is necessary so that reserves are available when staging. Do not use overripe fruits. Unripe fruits are not ideal except where allowed in certain classes. Figs with signs of splitting and gages with signs of slight shrivelling can be exhibited as these are a sign of ripeness.

Packing Pack carefully bearing in mind that soft fruits may be damaged by their own weight; avoid packing too many in one container. Keep in a cool place.

Presentation and staging Aim for a neat, attractive presentation, as symmetrical as possible. Do not polish the fruits.

- Apples and similar-shaped fruits should be staged with the eye uppermost, stalk end downwards, placing one fruit in the centre and the remainder around it. The centre fruit can be raised. Do not cut the stalks.
- Berries, excluding blueberries, look most attractive if placed in lines. The stalks and calyces should look green and fresh and all point one way. Reject malformed and damaged fruits. Blueberries should be staged around the perimeter of a plate.
- Worcesterberries and currant × gooseberry hybrids should have strigs intact and laid roughly parallel, the bottom of the strigs to the front of the plate. Mound the fruit in the centre.
- Grapes are usually shown in one of two ways. Unless some other method of staging is specified or permitted by the schedule, glasshouse grapes should be staged on stands and should be pulled well up onto the board. Outdoor grapes grown for winemaking or dessert may be shown on plates.
- Most pears, pear-shaped quinces and figs are best arranged around the perimeter of a plate with the stalks towards the centre.
- Plums, cherries and similar-shaped fruits are best laid out in lines across the plate. It is important that the bloom is not disturbed, and the stalks are intact.

The preparation and presentation of vegetables

Where necessary, vegetables should be carefully washed to remove soil but in no circumstances should oils or similar substances be applied in an attempt to enhance their appearance. Wash with a soft cloth and plenty of water: brushing will damage the skin and spoil the appearance of the exhibit. Retain the natural 'bloom' wherever possible. All vegetables should be handled carefully during preparation.

Vegetables should be staged as attractively as possible on plates or direct on the table.

Artichokes, globe Disbud the lateral heads leaving only the large main head. Stage heads on a plate, stalks to the centre.

Asparagus peas, mangetout and snap peas Select fresh pods of good colour, that snap easily, and of a size appropriate for the cultivar. Approximately 30-40mm with stalk attached.

Aubergines Cut the fruit carefully and stage on a plate, taking care to retain the natural skin condition.

Beans, broad; French, climbing or dwarf; runner; and shelling, other than broad (eg borlotti and similar types) Exhibit fresh pods of uniform colour. Stage a uniform sized exhibit with pods arranged on a plate or directly on the bench; in a line with the tail ends facing the front. With all beans it is advisable to check one or two spare pods to assess the condition and interior freshness. Cut all pods from the vine with scissors, ensuring that each pod has a portion of stalk.

Beetroot Select roots of even size; for globe beetroot, between 60 and 75mm; for long beetroot as for parsnips (see later); and for cylindrical cultivars, roots approximately 150mm in length. Avoid specimens with poor skin colour at the base of the root or that do not have a single taproot. Small side roots should be removed. Take care in washing as all marks will show up clearly after a few hours. Trim the foliage to approximately 75mm.

Brussels sprouts Cut from the main stem with a knife, all stalks to be approximately the same length. Choose tightly closed sprouts of uniform size. Do not remove too many other leaves, otherwise depth of colour is reduced.

Cabbages Choose solid heads of equal size, clean and with a good waxy bloom. Take care not to mark the bloom. Reject split specimens and any damaged by pests. Remove only a minimum of outer leaves. Stage with approximately 75mm of stalk remaining and heads towards the front.

Carrots Choose firm, fresh, blemish free specimens of good even colour and uniformity, without discolouration at the top. Carrots should have the soil or growing medium soaked at the time of lifting to avoid damage to the root. Cut off the foliage to approximately 75mm. Lay side by side in a triangular formation with the root end facing the front.

Cauliflowers, calabrese and broccoli, coloured headed Reject pest damaged, discoloured, split, loose or uneven-sized heads. Stage with approximately 75mm of stalk remaining. Just prior to staging, trim back leaves so that they match the level of the outside of the curd.

Cover white curds with clean paper or cloth to exclude light but remove immediately before the start of judging.

Celery Choose only heads that have no diseased or pest-damaged foliage and that have not been damaged by slugs. Reject specimens with heart rot or with flowerheads forming. Place a tie round the base of the leaves to prevent breaking and clean by a continuous flushing with water; ensure all pests are removed. Before staging neatly trim off the roots, leaving a pointed butt end. In dish classes where few heads are required, lay them flat on the show bench. In collection classes, enhance specimens by displaying them on a blackboard. To exclude light, cover with clean paper or a damp cloth which must be removed immediately prior to judging.

Courgettes Select young, tender, shapely and uniform fruits approximately 150mm in length and approximately 25-35mm in diameter, in any colour, or in the case of round cultivars approximately 75mm in diameter. Stage flat with or without flowers still attached.

Cucumbers Fruits should be completely matched and of a good, fresh green colour. The flower end should be completely developed, the barrel well shaped and with a short handle. Display specimens flat on the show bench. It is not necessary that flowers remain attached. Cucumbers grown under protection should be 250mm or more in length. Outdoor-grown cucumbers can be smaller.

Fennel, Florence Roots should be neatly trimmed off and foliage trimmed back to approximately 75-100mm, but with terminal foliage retained.

Flower sprout, Petit Posy Cut main stem with a sharp knife, trim all the stalks to be of the same length. Choose nice open sprouts of similar size with good colour and no pest damage. Exhibit in a shallow bowl of water to retain freshness. Cover dish with damp paper towel to reduce moisture loss while staging. Remove for judging.

Garlic Clean off all soil fragments, dry completely. Reduce the dried stem to approximately 25mm and remove the roots. Stage bulbs as complete specimens; do not divide into segments (cloves).

Kale It is recommended that leaves are exhibited in vases to maintain freshness.

Kohlrabi Choose tender, fresh specimens of a size according to cultivar. Trim roots neatly. Cut side foliage back to approximately 20mm and retain the terminal foliage. Stage in clean condition, but do not wash, and retain the natural bloom.

Leeks Specimens should be uniform in length, in good condition and solid (i.e., firm and compact throughout the length of the barrel) with a good, uniform blanch that is not bulbous at the base. Avoid excessive stripping of outer leaves, otherwise unsightly ribbing is exposed. In dish classes, preferably stage the leeks to lie flat on the bench with the roots to the front, neatly teased out and well cleaned. Ensure that the stem (barrel), leaves (flags) and roots (beard) are flushed clean with tap water, which should not be allowed to run between the leaves leaving unsightly soil particles. Avoid soft, discoloured specimens, or evidence in the stem and leaves of rust disease. Place specimens in collections vertically on a

blackboard, complementing celery, where shown, in length. Bind in the leaves to an appropriate length. Reject specimens that show evidence of the formation of a flowerhead. Some schedules have classes for intermediate leeks i.e., where the blanch to the tight button is more than 150mm and less and 350mm. Pot leeks call for a 150mm maximum blanch from root base to 'tight button', ie the point where the lowest leaf breaks the circumference of the blanched stem. Size should be of a maximum cubic capacity.

Lettuce Lift with roots intact in the evening or early morning when the leaves are turgid. Fresh heads of uniform and attractive colour are essential. Roots should be washed, wrapped in moist tissue, inserted in a plastic bag and neatly tied. Wash, avoiding soil particles collecting between the leaves. Remove damaged outside leaves and stage laid on the show bench with the hearts facing the front.

Marrows Choose tender, young uniform fruits which should be less than 350mm long or, in the case of round cultivars, approximately 500mm in circumference. Old, mature fruits that are not suitable for table use should be excluded. Wipe clean and stage directly on the show bench.

Onions Uniform, well-ripened bulbs of good colour are required. Avoid soft, stained specimens with thick, immature necks. Do not over-skin. The tops should be neatly tied, and the roots neatly trimmed back to the basal plate. Onions are often staged on rings or soft collars. Pickling onions should not exceed 30mm in diameter, nor should the necks be tied. Onions on ropes should contain 8 onions neatly presented, either tied or plaited. Check quantities.

Onions, green salad Stage plants with foliage and roots attached, and well washed.

Oriental brassicas, heading types Choose representative specimens of equal size, clean and with good bloom. Reject damaged heads. Display with roots intact, well washed, wrapped in moist tissue, inserted in a plastic bag and neatly tied.

Parsley Show only by itself as a herb. It may be used as a garnish for a collection of vegetables but should receive no points in this case except under the heading 'arrangement'.

Parsnips Roots should be straight and of good length, evenly tapered and well developed. Great care should be taken in lifting the roots, as bruising by fingers and scratching by soil particles will show later. Parsnips should have the soil or growing medium soaked at the time of lifting to minimise damage to the root. Wash thoroughly with clean water. Cut off the foliage to approximately 75mm. Lay side by side in a triangular formation with the root end facing the front.

Peas Pods should be uniform in length and in good condition. Judges will open and check pods during their examination. When cutting from the vine retain the waxy bloom intact without finger marks. Gather by cutting with scissors and with approximately 25mm of stalk, holding the pod at all times by this. Holding pods up to a strong light will detect internal damage and reveal the number of peas in the pod. Arrange on a plate or directly on the bench, in a line with tail end facing the front.

Peppers, sweet and hot (chilli) Select fruit of the right size, shape and colour for the cultivar. The exhibit should be uniform in colour. Fruit may be shown immature but fully formed, usually green, or at the mature or coloured stage. Mature specimens are to be preferred.

Potatoes Select medium-sized specimens, generally between 200g and 250g. Choose equally matched tubers with shallow eyes. Freedom from skin blemishes that may be caused by pests, diseases or careless handling is important. Very carefully wash the tubers in clean water with a soft sponge – do not use a coarse cloth or brush. Stage on plates with the nose end outwards; cover with a cloth to exclude light until judging commences.

Pumpkins Show a well-formed specimen, mature and of good colour.

Radishes, small salad The body of the radish should be fresh, firm, medium-sized, young, tender and brightly coloured. It should be free from blemishes and with foliage trimmed to approximately 30mm. Dig at the last possible moment to retain maximum turgidity. Cut spare specimens to check internal condition.

Rhubarb Stalks should be fresh, straight, long and tender with well-developed colouring. Cut off top foliage of natural rhubarb leaving approximately 75mm from start of leaf stalks. Do not cut off foliage of forced rhubarb. Wipe stalks clean and trim off any bud scales at the bottom.

Salsify and scorzonera Roots should be clean and straight and with approximately 75mm of leaf stalk remaining.

Shallots Stage as separate bulbs and not as clusters. Bulbs should be thoroughly dried, free from staining and loose skins. Cut off roots to the basal plate and tie the tops neatly. Stage on dry sand or similar material which should (preferably) be of a contrasting colour and piled on the plate slightly to raise the centre. Shallots for pickling must not exceed 30mm in diameter.

Spinach, spinach beet, chard (including white and coloured cultivars) Use large, very fresh, thick, undamaged, well coloured leaves and stalks. Mixed colours of leaves and stems will be permitted if from a mixed variety. Defer gathering until the last possible moment to retain turgidity and so that there is a little delay as possible before staging. Leaves should be complete with a neatly trimmed stalk. Display for effect in a vase with water. Careful handling is essential.

Squash, summer Select young, tender, shapely and uniform fruits, normally not more than five days after flowering. Cut fruit from the vine, taking care not to mark the tender flesh. Stage as for courgettes.

Squash, winter Select fully coloured, mature fruit, with few blemishes, and of a size according to cultivar. Retain the stalk.

Sweet corn Cobs of uniform size with fresh green husks should be displayed with approximately one quarter the grain exposed by pulling down sharply, from the tip to the

base. The best cobs are filled to the tip with straight rows of tender grains. The grains should be well-filled, not shrivelled. The stalks should be trimmed.

Tomatoes Select fruit of the right shape, size and colour for the cultivar. Fruit should not be overripe or with hard 'green back' colouring around the calyx. Aim for a uniform set of ripe fruits with firm, fresh calyces. Stage on a plate, calyx uppermost.

Tomatoes, truss Cut the truss from the plant carefully, as near the main stem as possible. Both mature and immature fruits may be shown but at least one third of the fruits should be fully ripe, displaying the natural colour for the cultivar.

Turnips and swedes Select fresh, tender, disease-free roots of a size and shape according to cultivar, but not over-large, and with a small taproot. Wash carefully, remove dead foliage. Cut a spare root to check inside for disease and condition.