

FARM AND GARDEN



Objectives

To encourage uniformity in exhibiting and judging agricultural products in Maryland. (For use at county, regional, and state fairs and shows, for all classes: 4-H, open, youth and others.)

To enhance the educational value of agricultural products exhibits.

To re-emphasize the purpose of agricultural products exhibits.

Purpose

The purpose of agricultural products exhibits is to demonstrate and reward GOOD MARKET QUALITY.

Exhibitions should educate and serve as incentive for higher quality production and better market preparation. They should be competitive and inspirational. They should also prepare youth to enter the world of agricultural production and marketing.

Whether grown to be sold or consumed at home, products at their best market quality will be at their prime, meeting judging and/or buyers standards. And, they can be produced consistently.

Judging Standards

Follow specific exhibit rules and regulations as to quantities, condition and other criteria.

Judges should use their own expertise and discretion, with the following standards in mind, to evaluate and place each entry.

GENERAL STANDARDS

Clean
Free from damage or blemishes
Very uniform in size, shape, color and maturity
Of best market size and quality
True to variety type

Showmanship

Agricultural product exhibition is the art of displaying quality products attractively. Showmanship is that "something extra" in preparation which often makes the differences between a good and an excellent display. Good display is essential to marketing agricultural products.

Tips for Prize-Winning Entries

FOLLOW ALL RULES AND REGULATIONS TO THE LETTER

Pay special attention to provide the exact number of items listed for each class. Too many or too few will result in disqualification.

Check special preparation requirements in the catalog carefully.

Containers, used as part of an entry, must be clean with any visible labels removed. Do not cover containers.

To transport entries - wrap individual items neatly with plenty of padding. Keep them cool and in water if needed.

Have entries properly prepared before arrival at the exhibit and ready to be registered.

Remember: Best Market Quality and Size, Uniformity, Condition - clean and free of damage, and True to Variety.

A Note to Judges

Judges are encouraged to write comments on all entries. Although this process is time consuming, it is one of the most important educational aspects of Agricultural Product exhibits and will result, over time, in better entries and better products. The importance of constructive comments cannot be over-emphasized.

The following sections provide more specific information on individual commodities.

Crops must always be shown at their best. Some grooming is important, but grooming should not give an unnatural look to the crop. Here are the main characteristics a judge evaluates in each exhibit.

Quality: One of the most important but difficult characteristics to describe is quality. Quality means that the vegetable is at its best and in prime eating condition. In some vegetables prime eating condition may be at a fairly young stage such as in summer squash, beets or green beans. In others, such as tomato, watermelon or eggplant, it means fully developed fruits at the peak of maturity. The inherent quality of a vegetable includes color, shape, texture, taste and size. Quality is also a measure of the ability of the person who has grown the vegetable for display.

Condition: The condition is a measure of how the crop has been handled. An important part of this evaluation is cleanliness. Such items as tomato or pepper are seldom a problem, but root crops such as onions, potatoes and beets, or leaf crops such as lettuce may present problems in cleaning. Do not wash vegetables for exhibit unless absolutely necessary. Use a very soft cloth or brush, and lightly remove any soil. Washing may remove the waxy "bloom" on some vegetables, which should be left on. In others, washing gives an unnatural "scrubbed" appearance.

Vegetables also must be free from blemishes. These may be caused by insects, diseases or poor handling. Presence of such damage indicates poor care or culture and is a serious fault. Sun scald or hail damage are also undesirable. Slight bruising or punctures caused by handling are also undesirable but, if small, are not rated downward as much as damage by insects or diseases.

Uniformity: One of the most obvious conditions of a display is uniformity. Uniformity of the products in the display is another measure of ability since it is more difficult to grow a large number of vegetables that look like "peas in a pod." The larger the planting, however, the more likely an exhibitor is able to develop very uniform displays.

Size is important, and all vegetables in one exhibit should be uniform in size. In addition to being the same size, they should be typical of the variety - not too large or too small. There are no extra points for oversized vegetables, and sometimes these may be at a disadvantage.

Uniform ripeness is also important. The display with slightly immature and uniform vegetables is better than one containing items at different stages of maturity.

There also should be uniformity of shape. Onions in a single display should be all the same shape. Do not mix flat and round types. In selecting peppers, small pumpkins or eggplant, select shapes as identical as possible.

Uniform color is very evident and important. A single item in a display that is off color is a serious fault. Green peppers should all be green. One with a red splotch on it downgrades the display.

Typical of variety: All vegetables in the same exhibit should be the same kind and variety. Mixing types or varieties is usually an automatic disqualification. All entries should be typical of the variety. Some shows require that the variety be listed with the display. This practice is often helpful to the judge, especially in the case of very new or unusual varieties.

JUDGING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Specific considerations on judging the 90 possible classes of fruits and vegetables is beyond the scope of this manual. However, some general guidelines are presented to help you better recognize high-quality fruits and vegetables and rank each class accordingly.

Judging fruits and vegetables is simply a matter of making choices. Consumers buy fruits and vegetables at the market by selecting those most appealing to them on the basis of external quality and past experience. Visit produce markets or produce sections of grocery stores to examine fruits and vegetables. Try to identify the best quality produce and determine why some produce is of inferior quality. Notice that almost everyone “selects” fruits and vegetables - they don’t just take the first one of closest ones. The key is learning, through experience, how to select the best produce.

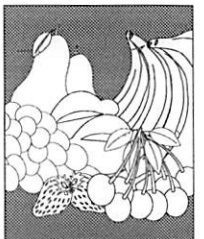
Judging fruits and vegetables is based on common sense factors. The following criteria should be used when evaluating the quality of produce:

1. A specimen should be properly identified as to variety, or cultivar. For example, if you think you are purchasing a “McIntosh” apple, you will probably not be satisfied with a red “Delicious” apple.
2. Specimens should be fresh and at the optimum stage of maturity for eating. Produce that is overmature or immature is downgraded.
3. Specimens should be clean and free from insects and diseases or any damage caused by such pests.
4. Specimens should be free of bruises and blemishes. Although many surface blemished do not affect eating quality, they do reduce eye appeal.
5. Specimens within a plate should be uniform in size, shape, color and type. Each plate within a class will have the same number of specimens.

When grading, first visualize the ideal specimen. Then consider all departures from this based on the above criteria and common sense. Factors which affect usefulness are downgraded more than other factors. For example, severely overripe bananas would be ranked below bananas with slight abnormalities in size or shape. The plate with the most defects and serious faults should receive the lowest ranking. It is usually best to identify the worst group (plate) within a class first. Then pick the best of the remaining three groups. Finally, try to place the final two groups in rank order.

In our scoring scheme, the correct selection of the best group or specimen within a class is worth 76% of the total score for that class regardless of how the other 3 groups are ranked. By correctly placing the best and worst groups (specimens) within a class, the contestant earns 88% of the possible points for that class.

FRUIT



Section 2 Fruits

General Considerations

All exhibits must be grown by the exhibitor.

List variety for each fruit.

Fruits should generally be shown in their best edible stage, if judging will be done the day of entry. If not, enter less ripe specimens that will remain in good condition.

The average size from a commercial standpoint, rather than the largest specimens, should be exhibited.

Strive for uniformity.

Clean tree fruit with a soft, dry cloth or a soft brush to bring out the natural sheen.

Stems should remain on apples, pears, plums and cherries.

Harvest fruit in the early morning and store in a cool place to remove field heat, which can reduce quality.

Selection of Individual Fruits

Apples - Stems must be present but not the fruit spur or leaves. Color should be uniform, bright and representative of the variety. Size should be ideal for variety and shape should be characteristic. Clean gently with soft cloth to bring out natural sheen.

Pears - Stems should be attached. Color, size and shape must be uniform. Specimens should be free from blemish or injury.

Peaches - Strive for uniformity. The basic fruit color is yellow. Red cheeks will vary with variety. Show without stems. Harvest and transport carefully to avoid bruising. Avoid over ripe specimens for exhibition.

Plums and Cherries - Leave stems attached. Select uniform plump, ripe specimens. Clean gently with a soft cloth if needed. Do not remove the bloom on plums.

Grapes - Bunches must be full and uniform in size. The fruit should be uniform and plump with the natural bloom present. The stem should be neatly cut to the same length on each cluster. Any decayed portion of the cluster should be neatly removed. Each grape should be firmly attached.

Raspberries and Blackberries - Each specimen in a box should be uniform in size, shape, color and ripeness. The fruit should be clean. Handle carefully to avoid mechanical injury.

Blueberries - Each berry in the box should be uniformly plump and ripe with the natural bloom present. Use caution when picking to avoid tearing the fruit.

Strawberries - Each berry in the box must be uniform in size, shape and color. The stem and cap must be attached. Trim stems uniformly. Green streaked or malformed berries should be avoided. Clean soil from specimens gently with a soft painter's brush. Do not wash.

Fruit Displays

A fruit display is a collection of different kinds of fruit grouped together in an attractive manner. Any produce commonly classed as a fruit may be used, including those listed above. Fruit should be identified by variety. Quality, attractiveness and arrangement are important factors. Make the exhibit colorful and establish a central point of interest. Display the number of fruits called for in the catalog.