

Advice, Hints and Tips for Exhibitors at the Harrogate and District Allotment Federation Annual Show



General

- Study the Show Schedule in detail and note the specific instructions/requirements for any classes you intend to enter.
- Follow those instructions/requirements explicitly. Failure to do so will result in a dreaded NAS (“Not as Scheduled”) ticket.
- Only enter classes for which you believe you can stage an exhibit.
- Detailed preparation before the Show is never wasted.
- Allow plenty of time for staging exhibits on the day of the Show. This always takes longer than expected and a last-minute rush will lead to mistakes.
- Where more than one item is called for, uniformity is important. Items should be closely matched in both size and shape and usually in variety also. Take some spares along, in case of accidents.
- Exhibits should be staged as attractively as possible in line with the rules and the Show schedule. The arrangement of an exhibit may be the deciding factor for the judges.
- Once you have finished staging, re-visit each of your exhibits and check that they comply with the schedule. Also check that your exhibitor’s card is in place (name down!) and that it matches the exhibit.
- The most important judging criterion across all fruit, vegetable and flower classes is condition. Whatever else you do, if your exhibit is stale, wilting or full of caterpillars it will not win.
- The general and specific advice below also applies to the appropriate Novices Classes.

Vegetables: General

- Specialist seeds will give you an advantage. They cost more but have been grown and selected over the years to achieve high standards. Try Robinsons at www.mammothonion.co.uk or Medwyns of Anglesey at www.medwynsofanglesey.co.uk or the National Vegetable Society at www.nvsuk.org.
- Judges like to see that vegetables have their natural “bloom” and the more they are cleaned and handled the more this disappears. Root vegetables should be cleaned with cold water and a flannel and/or sponge. Do not rub too hard.
- Plates are provided at the Show.

Vegetables: Specifics

- Top Tray: The detailed rules are in the Show Schedule. They must be followed exactly.
- Onions and Shallots: The judge can tell if there are grown from seeds or sets. Be sure your onions are in the right class. 227grams is 8 ounces. For large onions the choice of variety makes all the difference with Robinsons Mammoth and Kelsae both performing well. For shallots the variety Hative de Niort is the best show bench performer. Lift onions in early August and allow the skins to dry. Find your matching onions. Peel off the minimum amount of damaged skin and carefully rub off the dry roots and tie the tops with damp raffia. When it dries it will shrink slightly. Small collars/rings will allow you to display onions to best effect in an upright position. Shallots are best exhibited on a plate of fine, dry sand.

- Carrots: Should be fresh, firm with smooth skins and good colour all down the length of the root. Discard any with slug or carrot root fly damage. Foliage should be trimmed to approximately 75mm (3 inches) in length. Wash with a soft sponge and remove any small side hairs. Do not remove the bottom tap root. Keep wrapped in a damp towel until they go onto the show bench.
- Potatoes: Dig up a week before the Show. You need four matching tubers. Wash carefully in cold water with a sponge. They should be free of slug holes and other blemishes and should fit nicely in the palm of your hand. Potatoes with cream skin (e.g. Charlotte) are classed as whites but rarely score as highly as true whites such as Winston. Varieties that are predominantly white but which have coloured eyes (e.g. Kestrel) must be shown in the coloured potatoes class. Most seed catalogues will indicate which of the available varieties are likely to win on the show bench. Avoid greening by keeping your tubers in the dark ahead of benching.
- Cauliflower/Cabbage: Choose solid heads. When cutting do so carefully, taking the guard (outer) leaves as well as the heart. When preparing for the Show remove the minimum of the guard leaves and try not to remove the “bloom” from those that remain. Trim the stem to a minimum of 5cm (2 inches). Finally check for any pests. Judges look for specimens with good strong colour and little or no insect/slug damage. The weight of a cabbage is more important than size; it must feel solid.
- Sweetcorn: Cobs must be of uniform size with fresh, green husks and should be displayed with approximately one quarter of the grain exposed, by pulling down sharply, from the tip to the base and removing a number of husks.
- French/Runner Beans: When cutting leave the stalk attached. Check to make sure they are not stringy; the judge will snap one from each exhibit to check this.
- Beetroot: Should be symmetrical, firm, and fresh, with a single root (tail). Clean carefully with cold water and a sponge. Try to remove any fine side roots. Optimum size is as a tennis ball. Cut the foliage to about 75mm (3 inches).
- Courgettes: Should be young, tender fruits of good shape (ideally straight), matching colour and length. Don't forget to check that; 15cm is 6 inches. Freshly picked is best. Show with or without the flower. If that drops off at the Show, leave it on the plate.
- Marrows: As for courgettes these should be of matching length and shape. 35.5cms is 14 inches. These are really overgrown courgettes so allow one plant to produce a couple (or three for safety!) of fruits as big as possible but be careful about the length on the day.
- Tomatoes: Other than cherry. Aim for a uniform set of fruits of around 60mm diameter. Cut from the vine with a bit of stem and the calyx attached. For cherry this is a fruit of about 30mm diameter, otherwise the same.
- Cucumber: Fruits should be a good, fresh, green colour. Try to keep the flower on the fruit.
- Sweet Peppers: Select fruit of the right shape, size and colour for the individual cultivar. A uniform colour is needed.
- Culinary Herbs: These should be a good selection for a cook to have to hand.
- Any vegetable not in schedule: Follow the general guidelines as set out above to ensure that the exhibit is clean, fresh and in tip-top condition.

Fruit: Specifics

- Cooking apples: Dessert apples: Plums; Soft fruit (single variety): Pick fruit as near to the time of the Show as possible. Pick with stalks intact, using scissors to cut rather than fingers. The stalks and calyces should be fresh and green. Aim for an attractive presentation, free from blemishes and uniform in colour and size.

Flowers: General

- Cut stems in the cool of the evening or early morning. Cut stems as long as possible, making a slanting cut so as to aid water intake. For chrysanthemums slit the stems about 75mm (3 inches) up from the base or dip the ends in boiling water. This will help with water intake on woody stems. Handle the show material as little as possible.
- Carry cut stems downward and store away from strong light, heat and draughts. Try to cut a few spares and take them to the Show just in case.

- When stems have been cut and labelled, remove the lower leaves and unwanted side shoots and plunge them up to their necks in water, covering to exclude light, but don't damage the flowers. Do this the night before, so as to encourage expanding blooms before the Show.
- All vases will be provided. Choose a vase that is appropriate to the size of your exhibit and which will display it to best effect. At the Show remove all damaged leaves, shoots etc. Cut off the bottom of the stem to assist with water intake (don't forget to put water in the vases), making sure that the stem length is appropriate for the vase. There should be a good balance of flowers of even size and quality in an appropriately sized container. Some people give their plants a final spray with clean water to freshen things up.

Flowers: Specifics

- Garden News Top Vase: The detailed rules are in the Show Schedule. They must be followed exactly.
- Chrysanthemums: Spray Chrysanthemums are easier to grow but if you want to show it is advisable to source suitable varieties as some perform better than others on the show bench. A specialist supplier such as Halls of Heddon should be able to advise on this. It is best to "stop" (remove growing tips) the plants once they have been planted out, to make them "break" (branch). The stopping date determines when they will flower and good suppliers will recommend stopping dates for each variety. Don't grow all the breaks. It is best to restrict it to between three and five. Make sure the plants are well supported as they will grow over a metre in height and will snap when windy. When growing sprays for show it is advisable to remove all the central terminal buds and to grow on the top five or six side buds on each stem for flowering. Aim to have an even, well-spaced head of flowers. Blooms can be picked several days before the Show and kept in buckets of cold water in a cold place, especially if a summer storm is forecast. Use a suitable sized vase and use florists' foam or crumpled newspaper to arrange the blooms in the vase, having stripped the foliage from the bottom of the stems but not from above the edge of the vase.
- Annuals/Perennials (Other than sweet peas): As the general guidelines.
- Gladioli: The stems of blooms should be straight and should contain no shrivelled or faded florets. On the ideal stem the lower third of the florets should be fully open and the middle section should be showing colour, with the top third being tightly furled. Remove any secondary blooms before staging. There should be about 15mm (six inches) above the lip of the vase before the first bloom. Leaves may be left on the stem but don't overdo it as they can distract from the exhibit.
- Sweet Peas: Choose stems of equal length with the same number of florets on each one. Four is the number to aim for with the top two not being fully open at staging. Judges usually favour six blooms of the same variety but you can include two or more varieties in the same vase if you wish. Use Spencer varieties not grandiflora types. Stems should be fanned evenly across the vase: to obtain this you could use newspaper or florist's foam. It is permissible to mask the front and rear of the vase with a fresh leaf.
- Dahlias: Unless it is a class for mixed dahlias pick equally sized blooms. Pompons must be less than 55mm (2 inches) in diameter and the judges carry a measuring device. Although the blooms do not need to be the same variety a mixed trio will rarely beat three good blooms of the same variety. Do not cut stems too short or leave too long. The distance from the edge of the vase to the bottom of the bloom will depend on the size of blooms being exhibited but the exhibit should not appear to be cramped or gangly. Use florists' foam or crumpled newspaper to arrange the blooms in the vase. Try to form a triangle with the blooms, leaving a small gap between each bloom.

Types of dahlia

Collarette: Collarette Dahlias have flowers with a single ring outer ring of generally flat petals (ray florets) with a ring of smaller petals (florets) forming a collar.

Pompon: Pompon dahlias are generally miniature in size and have petals that are involute for the whole of their length, the bloom must also be spherical.

Cactus: The petals are narrow from tip to base and the bloom appears full.

Decorative: Decorative dahlias have petals that are generally broad and flattened and may be involute for no more than 75% of their length or slightly twisted, usually they have a blunt point to their petals. Some decoratives have petals that are slightly pointed. The bloom must be fully double and show no disc (as in a daisy flower).

Ball: A ball dahlia has a ball shaped fully double flower that may be slightly flattened. The ray florets of a ball dahlia are blunt or rounded at the tips and spirally arranged. The petals must be involute for at least 75% of their length.

- Roses (including Single Rose): The bloom should be of good, average size for a well-grown plant of the cultivar in question. The appearance should be sparkling and clean with no suggestion of tiredness, staleness or unnatural preservation. The colour should be bright with no suggestion of bluing or tarnishing. Stems must be straight and proportionate in thickness to the size of the bloom. Petals should be symmetrically arranged within a circular outline. It is acceptable to retain some fresh, clean foliage, but not too much.
- Lady's Spray: Gentleman's Buttonhole: Blooms should be fresh, symmetrical with firm petals
- An Arrangement in a basket/Floral Miniature: Follow the appropriate advice from the above sections.

Judging

Each section has a different judge and they judge according to specific criteria. The flowers judge will use the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) criteria, the vegetables judge will use the National Vegetable Society (NVS) criteria and the domestic judge will use the Women's Institute (WI) criteria.

"The Horticultural Show Handbook", published by the RHS contains a wealth of information on competing in a show, as well as listing in detail the flowers and vegetables judging criteria. The latter are similar to those of the NVS so the one book can usefully cover both areas.



If you are interested in learning a bit more about showing, NVS have a guide entitled 'Getting Started on the Show Bench; a beginners guide to growing and showing' <http://nvsuk.org.uk/guides.html> and the WI guide called "On with the Show" is available from them. <https://wishop.thewi.org.uk/publications/on-with-the-show>