

Characteristics of a Good Vegetable, Fruit or Herb Fair Entry

When you select vegetables for the fair, remember that a judge will evaluate on these characteristics described below. Characteristics that make an entry attractive to a judge are similar to what attracts you to buy them at a store.

- Quality
- General Condition
- Freedom from Injury
- Uniformity

Quality

Quality is indicated by a vegetable's color, size, shape and stage of development. Some entrants believe that they need huge vegetables to have a winning entry. Although large size is important in a few classes, like cabbage, pumpkin or watermelon, large size is not emphasized as much in most classes. As you plant your garden determine the best time to harvest a particular crop. Harvesting at fair time is ideal.

Variety: Judges want to know the variety that you grew. It is important to indicate this on your tag. It is worth 10 points in the judging.

Color: Select specimen that have a deep, clear, intense color. Avoid dull-colored specimens or those that are deep colored because they are overripe or too mature.

Trueness to Shape and Size: All specimens should be as true as possible to the type or shape of the variety.

Maturity or Stage of Development: Specimens should be in prime condition for eating at the time of judging

General Condition

The condition of entries is important and includes how fresh and clean the vegetables are and how they are trimmed.

Freshness: Many specimens are perishable so take measures to prevent shriveling. Harvest the vegetables as close to time you will enter them. Refrigerate them in plastic containers or closed containers.

Cleanliness: DO NOT WASH ENTRIES. Use a soft clean cloth or brushing them lightly with a soft brush is sufficient. This is particularly important with potatoes. Be cautious of rubbing too hard to damage skin but still remove the dirt. DO NOT PEEL ONIONS. Harvest bulbs 2 to 3 weeks before to the fair so they will be well ripened and outer scales will be dry and easily removed – this makes peeling unnecessary.

Trimming: Specimens should be neatly and properly trimmed, such like market produce. Squash and tomato stems should be left on. Root vegetable tops can be removed and trimmed to 1 inch.

Free from Injury

All specimens should be free from insects and diseases, as well as mechanical injuries. Mechanical injuries are those caused by weather or rough treatment during harvest. For example, you should not enter root crops that have been injured during digging or squash with stems torn off.

Uniformity

Each entry should be of similar size, color, state of maturity, shape and type. Judges place considerable importance on the uniformity of vegetables entered. The larger your supply of vegetables, the better chance you have to choose vegetables that are uniform in every aspect.

Size: Choose the size that is desirable on the market. You should keep sizes of like specimens similar. For example, do not place 2 large and 1 small tomato as your entry. Instead select 3 medium sized.

Shape: Select the shape most typical of that variety.

Color: Color should be uniform for all specimens of a variety. Intense, deep-colored specimens are preferred.

Maturity: Specimens entered should all be at the same stage of maturity.

Type: Specimens should all be the same variety. However, different varieties can be entered separately in the same category. For example, beefsteak, roma and celebrity tomatoes can be entered in the same category but as separate entries.

REMEMBER THESE IMPORTANT POINTS

- Don't show specimens that are injured.
- Don't show specimens that are not uniform in size, shape, color, maturity and type.
- Don't show overripe specimens.
- Don't show the biggest vegetable you have. Because unusual size frequently indicates poor quality due to over-maturity.

ADHERE TO THESE GUIDELINES AND YOU HAVE A BETTER CHANCE OF GETTING A RIBBON.

GOOD LUCK

This information comes from Helen Harrison, professor of horticulture, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Cooperative Extension Service, University of Wisconsin Extension.