

## **Tips for Entering a Flower Show from a Judge's Perspective**

(A Brief Compilation of Facts Found in the "Ontario Judging and Exhibiting Standards for Horticulture and Floral Design" and "Snippy Tips 1: Care of Cit Flowers and Plant Material").

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### **Some Important Terminology**

**Collection:** A specified number of cut flowers, potted plants, branches, fruits, vegetables or nuts.

**Conditioning:** The preparation of cut flowers, foliage and branches, promoting long-lasting turgidity and freshness.

**Display:** A collection considered for cultural perfection as well as for artistic effect (design qualities).

**Fasciation:** a condition common to lily, delphinium and prunus species where stems appear flattened and distorted.

**Disbudding:** Removal of surplus buds along the stem or in the axil of stems to promote growth of the terminal bud.

**Stem on Stem:** A phrase used to describe an entry that has its bloom on a new growth stem but a portion of the main stem it originated from is included in the entry.

### **Choosing Entries from the Garden**

1. Cut specimens at an angle either early morning or in the evening allowing at least 3 hours for conditioning.
2. Removing foliage which would otherwise be below water in its show container. Remove all foliage on materials to be used for design. Unless otherwise stated in the show schedule, foliage attached to the stem of specimen blooms, eg. rose, dahlia, leucanthemum and calendula must remain intact above the water line. Damaged leaves may be removed inconspicuously as long as sufficient foliage remains for judging.
3. Use the conditioning treatment specific to each specimen before placing in warm water. Use either a commercial preservative or 1 tbsp. sugar and half a tsp. of bleach per 4 cups of water.
4. Allow specimens to sit in water in a cool, dark place for at least 3 hours.
5. Choose a clean, size appropriate container for each entry and re-cut stems, removing additional foliage if needed. If the specimen has a large, heavy bloom, it may be required to 'wedge' the stem in order for the bloom to be positioned correctly.

### **Conditioning**

**Basic:** Cut stems as above and plunge into preservative.

**Scaling:** The cut stems that are hard shelled but soft in the centre, such as hydrangea, rose and chrysanthemum, are placed in boiling water for 1 – 3 minutes. Protect blooms with paper cones. Then place in preservative.

**Searing:** The cut stems of aster, papaver and euphorbia are blackened in a flame before placing in preservative.

**Water Filling:** The 'hollow' cut stems of lupin, delphinium and amaryllis are inverted and filled with water using small funnels and droppers. Ends are plugged with tissue, cotton, or held closed by hand until placed beneath preservative.

**Splitting:** Woody plant stems are split (with hand pruners cutting vertical) or crushed (with hammer at least an inch or more at end of stem) to allow more surface area to be exposed to the preservative.

**Submerging:** Cut foliage will remain fresh if allowed to be fully submerged in warm water for 2 hours. Those leaves that are blue or grey in colour with 'bloom', a powder-like substance, should not be submerged as their colour will change.

## **Potted Plants**

1. **Maturity:** Select well established, mature plants that have been in your care for at least 3 months.

2. **Cleanliness:** Clean pot, dust leaves using mild detergent and water; do not use leaf shine or oil. Remove dead plant material and any salt deposit from the surface of the soil.

**Do not enter plants that are diseased or have an infestation of insects!**

3. **Grooming:** Remove spent flowers and their stalks as well as any dead, yellowing or damaged leaves. There is exception to this when entering cacti/succulents. Dead or dying leaves and flowers may be left if they cannot easily be removed. For varieties requiring that only one plant or crown is allowed to be exhibited, eg. African Violet, remove any plantlets growing from the main stem. Symmetry in these entries is a big consideration and may require some outer leaves to be removed to achieve this. However, if many leaves have been removed and the plant has not been re-potted deeper in the pot, a 'long neck' or extended main stem may be cause for point deduction.

4. **Pot Size:** Pot should be in proportion to the overall size of the plant. Specifically for African violets, pot size should be approximately 1/3 the diameter of the plant.

5. **Foliage Plants:** Or, 'Plants not grown for Bloom'. All plants bloom but some are enjoyed for foliage and/or form. They can be shown while in bloom.

6. **Flowering Plants:** Plants entered in a flowering plant class must have bloom showing.

7. **Plant Collections:** Each plant must be in a separate container/pot. If a specific number is not stated in the schedule, enter a minimum of 3. More points are awarded for the most variety, their presentation, health and if they are identified.

## Individual Bloom Classes

(one bloom/scape/stem/spray/stalk)

1. Symmetry: Most important consideration. Petals should be arranged evenly around a circular centre.
2. Form: Bloom should be at its optimum stage of development. Roses should be  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  open whereas, other species must be fully open to reveal their centres. A bud showing colour is considered a bloom but is an improper form to enter in a class. Rose bud is still considered a bud when petals are starting to unfurl.
3. Colour: Choose a bloom whose colour is typical for its particular cultivar. Check for blotches and unusual colour streaking. The colour of the stamens and its pollen should be fresh and not browning with age.
4. Substance: 'Loss of substance' is a phrase used to describe the condition of the petals as they age. Their outer edges become transparent and may start to darken. Likewise, stamens collapse and curl inward as they age.
5. Stem, Foliage and Balance: 'Stem on stem' should not be visible above the vase. Foliage should be clean, fresh and unblemished and be distributed at even intervals on the main stem. Stems should not be fascinated but straight, strong and proportionate to the bloom and foliage.
6. Size: Enter the bloom that is typical in size for that particular cultivar. Most of the time, it is advantageous to show the largest blooms.
7. Floating Blooms: Do not include foliage. Bowl/dish and the water must be clear and colourless. Bloom should be fully open or  $\frac{3}{4}$  open depending on the schedule and float comfortably in the bowl without touch the sides. Too large a bowl will detract from the simplicity of the bloom hence causing a deduction in points.
8. Disbudding: Should be performed commonly on dahlia, rose and peony, but can be performed on other single flowering species such as leucanthemum, echinacea, zinnia and rudbeckia. Disbudding should be performed several days prior to it being shown to allow maximum time for increased growth to the bloom intended for entry. If the bloom is disbudded the day before or the day of the show, take extra care to remove the bud inconspicuously so as not to lose points.
9. Stalks/Spikes/Sprays/Branch: Individual blooms/florets on a stalk/spike/spray/branch are judged for their qualities as well as the overall quality of the spike/spray. It is important that the florets are evenly spaced and that the earliest to open are not showing signs of age. Ideally, there would be a natural progression of bloom to bud evident. In gladiolus,  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the florets should be open,  $\frac{1}{3}$  show colour and  $\frac{1}{3}$  do not show colour, they should all face forward and none should be removed. In iris, the individual flower stalks should be evenly spaced so that the flowers and buds are not clustered together and crowded. There is a penalty to enter a spray/branch that has a secondary stem of newer growth appearing below the original spray. This is termed 'spray with a branch'.

## Multiple Bloom Classes

(3 blooms/scapes/stems/stalks/sprays/spikes)

**Uniformity:** If a class requires more than one bloom/stem/spray/stalk etc., and it does not state that they may be different cultivars, each bloom/stem/spray/stalk etc. should be as close to identical as possible in every way ie. length and size of stem, size of bloom, colour, stage of development and condition. If the class indicates that different colours or cultivars are required, this class is now considered a collection and each individual bloom/stem is judged separately and the number of different varieties entered is taken into account. The entry that has 3 different cultivars may win over the entry that has 2 cultivars the same and only one that is different.

## Design Classes

1. Title Interpretation: If the design style is not given, eg. Line, Horizontal, Crescent etc., the title may give you a clue or inspire you to choose a specific style. Titles that suggest water, rain, lakes, rivers etc., are an indication that a water viewing or underwater design be used. Vertical Line designs are best for titles suggesting height as in 'The Sky's the Limit'. The title may help to indicate specific colours and materials you would use to convey your intentions: such as pinks and reds in 'Sunset', fruits and vegetables in 'Market Day' and Bird of Paradise in 'Tropical Thunder'. Sometimes a design class will encourage you to convey a feeling and the choice of colour and materials can often accomplish this. 'First Snowfall' would best be interpreted in white blooms and a silver container. 'Hot Flash' brings to mind the warmth of reds and oranges. 'In the Past' might feature older flower varieties such as roses, asters and dahlia. The most creative designs are abstract. Their interpretation is less obvious but the depth of their meaning is often more profound.

2. Container Choice: The container for a design can often be the key to success in design. The materials chosen for the design should not compete with the container for attention. The two should be 'married' to one another. In other words, both the container and the materials should be similar in some way. The container colour or texture as well as its shape or form should mimic the materials used in it. The size of the container must be proportionate to the amounts of plant material used in it as well as the size of the individual focal materials used. For example, a large heavy cement urn will look balanced with larger flower types such as dahlia and sunflower. Likewise, a miniature design that is created in a thimble, would be balanced by single florets cut from umbels of hydrangea or sedum. Be careful when using white containers as they can be visually distracting to the eye especially if the majority of the container is not covered by plant material. Also, be aware that the container can have a heavy 'look' to it even if physically, it is not. In this case, the materials should also be larger or darker to balance the heavy appearance of the container.

3. Plant Material Choice: As mentioned above, the title of the class and the containers you have available will dictate your choice for plant material. Often we are limited by what we have in our gardens, what others may offer us to use, by what is available from the florist and what our budget allows us to buy. So, apart from these limitations, a careful choice of materials can set a design apart from the rest. Try to pair mundane elements with the more unusual. The most usual plant form is circular, such as zinnia, leucanthemum, carnation, etc. If these are paired with the more unusual shape of lily or gladiolus, you will have achieved contrast. Add the texture of an interesting piece of drift wood for line and you have the makings of a first class design. Texture is always a welcome feature in a design and often adds that 'wow' aspect. Try using teasel, milk weed pods, fungus, birch, kiwi and curly willow branches. Experiment by including different types of fruits and vegetables. My favourite designs are foliage designs. Finding a variety in textures, shapes and colourations is more challenging. But the rules are still the same.

4. Common Errors:

a) Confused Line: This occurs when the line of the design does not follow a natural path, is disrupted or splits off into multiple directions.

b) Short Line: The line of the design is either not long enough for the size of the container used or is non-existent. This the most common error I encounter. The length of the entire design should be 1.5 to 2 times the largest dimension of the container. (height or width or diagonal).

c) No Focal Point(s): This happens when all the materials in a design are equal to each other. By this I mean that each element is the same size and shape. The viewer's eye needs to focus on specific points of interest and importance within the design and there should be a natural flow between them. This, however, is not the case in a modern mass design, where each element may carry the same weight of importance as the others. This style of design is viewed as a whole and not for individual focal points.

d) Poor Material Placement: Unfortunately, this an error that is only corrected through experience and understanding. Large heavy flower heads need to be placed low in a design in order to 'ground' the design to the container. It's later developing siblings can then rise higher from the container. If using flowers differing in colour value, deeper tones look heavier and are more suitable to be used lower in the container and hence lighter colours can be used further out to the edges of the design.

e) Accessories: Unless you have a good understanding of the proper use of accessories, it is best not to. They should be used only to enhance the design but never be the focal point of a design. If a class specifically says 'feature' a specific accessory, only then can an accessory dominate the design.