

West Harrow Allotment and Garden Association

Guidelines for the Annual Show

Please consult our Show Schedule in conjunction with this advice.

If the schedule says 9 beans then there must be nine beans!!

You may also wish to consult the RHS Horticultural Show Handbook.

Showing Vegetables

POTATOES. Always wash the potatoes carefully trying not to break the skin- Choose even sized tubers of similar shape.

White potatoes are all white. Coloured potatoes are any that have coloured marks e.g.; pink or mauve markings (Kestrel, King Edward, Cara) and of course the red varieties (Desiree and Kondor). Discard any tubers with slug damage. Try to use potatoes that have no scab marks.

ROOT VEGETABLES. Carrots, Parsnips Beetroot. These veg are treated the same. Wash them carefully trying not to damage the skins. Check for any slug or worm damage and discard. Choose roots, which are roughly the same size and shape. They do not have to be huge as long as they are similar in size. Beetroot do not have to be large, just choose even round ones about the size of a tennis ball. Parsnips must not have the rusty brown canker marks on them. Carrots come in different categories: stump rooted, intermediate or long.

After washing and drying the roots clean around the top where the leaves join the root. This can be done with a pointed knife. Gently scrape out any brown stuff and remove any brown or yellowing stalks or any broken stalks. Cut off the leaves to about 50mm (2 inches) above the top of the root. Tie together with either raffia or garden string to make a neat finish. Use veg that have no brown or green tops.

TIP. If your carrots are not quite straight you can wrap them firmly in damp newspaper and leave them in the fridge overnight. Take out in the morning and unwrap.

CABBAGE. Choose good firm cabbage with nice hard hearts. Pull the cabbage so the roots are still attached. Wash well getting all the soil from between the leaves. Carefully remove any damaged leaves and caterpillars. Cut off the roots leaving a stalk of about 50mm (2 inches) below the heart. Turn upside down to drain and dry off.

CELERY. Choose celery, which is of even size with no slug marks or damage. Cut off the roots quite close to the bottom of the stalks and taper to a point. Wash the plant thoroughly getting all the soil from between the stalks. Leave to drain. Sometimes the tops will need tying to keep the stems neat.

COURGETTE. These should be even sized ideally with their flowers still attached. Cut the courgettes with a knife leaving a small piece of stem. If the schedule says they must be between a certain size then make sure they are. Marrows and Pumpkins also need to be cut leaving a small piece of stem.

CUCUMBERS. Usually cucumbers are shown in pairs. Leave the final cut till staging. Choose two that are the same size and shape. Make sure there are no marks on them and that they are of the same variety.

BEANS. Whatever type of bean you are showing be it runners or dwarfs make sure they are young as the Judge will snap them just to see if they are stringy. They also need to be the same length and shape. When you pick the beans they need to have a little bit of stalk left on them. Again, make sure the beans have no brown marks or slug holes.

TIP. If your runners aren't quite straight wrap them firmly in either a damp tea towel or damp newspaper and put them in the fridge overnight.

LEEKS. Try to dig even sized leeks. Pull off any outer leaves that are not very good but do not remove too many. Trim off the tops but not too close to the white. Wash well getting all the soil from between the roots as well as between the green leaves. Trim the roots to about 25mm (1") from the bottom of the leek. Turn upside down to drain.

LETTUCE. Lettuces are usually shown in pairs. Pick two that are about the same size and shape. Pull the lettuce keeping the roots on. Remove any damaged or yellow leaves but not too many. Wash the lettuce carefully including the roots. Remove any slugs. Trim the roots slightly. Lettuce should have nice firm hearts.

ONIONS. DO NOT LEAVE THESE TO THE LAST MINUTE. Onions need to dry off so they need to be lifted fairly early and put somewhere for the skins to dry. You do not need to show the huge varieties either!

Rub off the loose skins when the bulbs are dry; Sometimes peeling the skins is required but go careful not to damage the skin below this. They can take about a month in a dark cool place to go brown again. Cut the stems leaving enough to be able to turn over and tie. Tying is done with either raffia or garden string. Wind the raffia round the stem making sure the cut bit is sealed and tie with a couple of knots. Don't tie the onions too early as the stems shrink if left to dry out and you will have to do them again! Very carefully slice the roots off close to the bottom of the bulb. This should be done with a sharp knife. Clean out where the root joins the bulb but don't go too deep. Choose even sized bulbs that are of the same shape and size and make sure they have no marks on them.

To stage onions they should be placed on little stands or rings. These can be made from toilet roll middles cut in half or kitchen roll middles cut into rounds. For showing onions that are classed as to pass through a 3"ring find something that measures slightly less than 75mm (3"). A flask cup or a mug is about the right size but check with a measure first. The onions that you wish to use should just drop through easily just touching the sides. If they rest on the top they are too big or if they drop down quickly they are too small.

SHALLOTS. These are treated the same as onions. Make sure that the shallot has only one bulb as sometimes there is a little bulb hiding under the skin. Again, make sure the shallots are even in size and shape. To get the size for shallots less than 25mm (1") find something that measures slightly under the 25mm. Again, they should slide through quite easily. To exhibit shallots they should be put on a container of dry sand, rice or dry peat.

PEAS. Peas should have nice full pods e.g. 9 peas per pod when held up to the light. They should be the same length. Always cut the stems a little away from the pod and handle the peas by the stem. Pea pods have a "bloom" on them and ideally this does not want to be removed but it is hard not to.

SWEET CORN. Sweet Corn needs to be pulled leaving a short stalk. Expose the cob by cutting a window in the leaves. Leave the fluffy bit on.

TOMATOES. As always choose firm even sized fruit. Cut the tomato stem leaving a little stalk and the green bit on. The same applies to cherry tomatoes. Sometimes a small sprig of parsley is placed in the middle of the plate when showing tomatoes. Wash the fruit well with cotton wool to remove any water marks.

THE BASKET OF PRODUCE. The items in a basket still need to be of a good quality but they can be less perfect than for the show bench. Make sure there are a good collection of different veg and fruit. Try to enter more than one of any variety and make it colourful. If you include herbs or Curly Kale put them in a jar of water. Rhubarb is always pulled, not cut, and the leaves are trimmed to leave about 25mm (1") from the stalk. Fruit such as strawberries and blackberries must have the stalks left on them. They can be put into small containers but do not use any with writing on them. Never polish apples and always leave a short stalk on them with the stalk facing down on the plate. It helps to put a few leaves on the plate before staging your fruit.

FLOWERS. Flowers should be shown with straight stems and they must be the same size. There should be no marks on either the petals or the leaves. Sweet Peas should have 4 or more flowers on each stem. Roses are shown not quite out in full bloom but also not in tight bud. To stop them from opening too soon put them in water and put them in the fridge. To get them to open quicker if they are too tight put them in warm water and then in a hot place.

HANDICRAFTS. The Judge must be able to see the backs of any pieces of work. When entering knitting the seams must be sewn up neatly and lightly pressed.

DOMESTIC. Jam pots must be filled to the top of the jars. The pot should have a waxed disc on top of the jam. All jellies must be clear otherwise it is classed as a cheese. Chutneys must be more than 3 months old or they taste too vinegary. Anything savoury should be staged on a plain napkin and savoury flans and scones must have straight sides (cut with a plain cutter or glass for scones). All exhibits must state what they are e.g. biscuits or savoury flans if you enter your own choice. If a recipe is on the schedule then it must be followed or the entry will be disqualified.