

## **Tips for County Fair Judges**

Wisconsin 4-H recommends that you use the following criteria to judge house plant entries at county fairs.

### **General County Fair House Plants Exhibiting Requirements**

- Exhibitors are usually required to write the variety or common name of the plant on the entry tag, a 3x5 card, or a popsicle stick inserted into the soil. They may also have to provide the date and type of plant propagation.
- Generally, exhibitors must furnish their own containers. Hanging baskets must have a hanger. Exhibitors are usually limited to one plant per pot.
- All house plants are to be home grown and cared for by the exhibitor. Exhibitors should have potted plants in their possession for several months before the show. Plants must have been grown in pots long enough to have become well established before exhibiting. Some county fairs allow youth to exhibit purchased or “started” plants, if the plant was purchased by a certain date, such as April 15.
- Two types of potted plants are usually exhibited at fairs – flowering plants and foliage (or green) plants. Flowering plants are judged for their flower display. There should be florets at the peak of perfection, with more bloom to come. While all foliage plants produce flowers (except ferns), plants in the foliage category are judged for their attractive leaves and stems. No extra points are awarded to foliage plants with flowers.
- County fairs usually say that all potted plants must have been grown indoors. Plants that show signs of having been recently dug from a garden and potted before the show should be disqualified.
- Exhibitors should not apply plant gloss or wax to the foliage because it destroys the natural look of the plant.

### **Judging Criteria for House Plant Exhibits**

House plants are judged for how close they are to perfection and how attractively they are displayed. Entries are judged on their appearance at exhibit time, not how they once looked or will look in the future. Superintendents and assistants should help correctly classify each entry. It is the superintendent’s responsibility to disqualify any entry for not meeting class requirements. Use these criteria when judging:

- *Cultural Perfection*: Leaf and stem color should be dark green or typical of the cultivar. Foliage must be dense, attractive, clean, and free from lint and dust in order to receive all points. All potted plants should be free of insects and diseases. Any old flowers should be removed from plants before competition.
- *Form*: To receive all points for form, plants should be symmetrical. A one-sided or unevenly developed plant indicates that the plant has been turned infrequently and, consequently, has grown toward the light source.
- *Plant Size*: Plants should be of an average or above-average size for their type. Size is a consideration of spread and fullness as well. For example, a number of points will not be awarded to a plant (e.g. a coleus) that is larger than normal simply because the gardener allowed it to develop one main stem.
- *Flower Number*: An abundance of flowers is highly desirable. Flowering plant entries are compared based on the number of open flowers and buds present. Plants without open flowers normally do not qualify for an award in a flowering class.
- *Flower Color*: Flower color should be true to the cultivar, clear, attractive, and free from unusual or uneven markings.
- *Distinctiveness*: Points for distinctiveness are given to an entry that is above average and possesses unusual, desirable characteristics. Distinctiveness is what distinguishes prize-winning flowering and foliage plants from average potted plants.