

Tips for County Fair Judges



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

General County Fair Vegetables Exhibiting Requirements

- The vegetables must come from the exhibitor's garden and the exhibitor must have been active in raising the vegetables.
- Exhibit requirements normally specify the class or kind of vegetables to be shown; number of specimens; type, shape, or size of containers; size, shape, color, and stage of maturity of individual vegetables; and whether the exhibit is to be an individual one or part of a larger display.
- Vegetables are usually exhibited on plates, in a group display, or as a "market basketful." For a plate exhibit, the numbers of specimens *usually* required for each vegetable are listed below. The market baskets may be referred to as garden displays, garden exhibits, or garden boxes. Emphasis in a garden display is placed on a well-balanced garden rather than on individual specimens. (Note: It's the superintendent's responsibility to disqualify entries for the wrong number of vegetables, not the judge's.)
- Vegetables may or may not be fully mature at fair time, depending upon the location of the fair and the time of year that the fair is held. If you are a judge, you need to be aware of these factors and be flexible in your expectations. Don't expect a fall vegetable, for example, to be mature at an August fair.

Judging Criteria for Vegetable Exhibits

Exhibits must be from this year's crop. Vegetables should be carefully selected, prepared, and exhibited. The characteristics of each vegetable that attract the judge and make for a winning exhibit are the same characteristics that make vegetables attractive to consumers. Use these criteria when judging:

Quality:

- *Color*. Select vegetables that have a deep, clear, intense color. Avoid dull-colored specimens, or those that are too deeply colored because they may be

overripe. Experience will help determine the best time to harvest a particular vegetable.

- *Marketable Size:* Many exhibitors believe that they need huge vegetables to have a winning vegetable entry. Although large size is important in a few classes – such as heaviest cabbage, largest pumpkin, or biggest watermelon – large size is not emphasized as much in most vegetable classes. Vegetables should be a size that will sell well on the open market. So, when deciding on what vegetables to exhibit at the fair, exhibitors should think in terms of the sizes most consumers want at the supermarket. Consumers generally prefer average-sized vegetables, not extremely large or small vegetables.
- *Trueness to Type or Shape:* All vegetables should be as true as possible to the type or shape of the variety. For example, an elongated beet is not typical of the cultivar “Detroit Dark Red” although some elongated beets may develop from “Detroit Dark Red” seed.
- *Maturity or Stage of Development:* Vegetables should be in prime condition for eating at the time of judging. In case of a late season or early fair, immature specimens are usually accepted. Judges should use a higher set of standards for judging green tomatoes and other immature vegetables, such as winter squash, if both mature and immature specimens are exhibited in the same class.

Condition:

- *Freshness:* Many vegetables are perishable, so measures should be taken to prevent shriveling. Vegetables that shrivel readily are young snap beans, beets, broccoli, carrots, celery, chard, Chinese cabbage, pickling cucumbers, endive, kohlrabi, lettuce, green onions, parsley, parsnip, radish, rhubarb, and spinach. These vegetables should be harvested as close to exhibit time as possible and refrigerated in plastic containers or other closed containers until shortly before exhibit time.
- *Cleanliness:* Vegetables should be clean and bright in appearance. Dirty vegetables indicate that the exhibitor was not interested in preparing an attractive, first-rate display. Sometimes vegetables can be cleaned by washing them, while in other cases, wiping them with a soft, clean cloth or brushing them lightly with a soft brush is sufficient.
- *Trimming:* Vegetables should be neatly and properly trimmed, much like market produce.

Freedom from Injury:

- *Insects, Diseases:* All vegetables should be free of damage from insects and diseases.
- *Mechanical Injuries:* Injuries caused by weather or rough treatment during harvest downgrade an exhibit. There should be no root crops with injuries from digging or squash with stems torn off.
- *Transportation:* To avoid any injury to exhibit vegetables when transporting them to the fair, exhibitors should pack the vegetables carefully in cloth or paper. They should place the wrapped vegetables in bushel baskets or boxes, using a lot of

crumpled paper between layers. Youth should also take along extra vegetables for each exhibit, in case something happens to the vegetables to be entered.

Uniformity:

- *Size:* The size should be the size that is desirable on the market. The biggest vegetable is usually not the best for many vegetables, because it often indicates poor quality. The sizes of like vegetables should be similar, e.g., there should not be four large tomatoes and one small tomato on a plate. The ideal exhibit would have five medium-sized tomatoes. Also, exhibitors should try to arrange the tomatoes on the plate so the largest and smallest ones are not next to each other.
- *Shape:* Specimens should have the shape most typical of that vegetable variety.
- *Color:* Color should be uniform for all vegetables of a variety. Intense, deep-colored specimens are usually preferred.
- *Maturity:* Vegetables exhibited should all be at the same stage of maturity.
- *Type:* Vegetables should all be the same variety.