

Tips for County Fair Judges - Wildflowers

Following is some information to help you judge wildflower entries at county fairs.

1. This is one of the few projects where youth may be able to show their specimens for more than one year as “continuing collections.” The sizes of wildflower collections grow as youth add 10-20 new specimens each year. They should not be able to show wildflowers that were previously shown by other individuals.
2. Wildflower specimens should always be properly pressed, mounted and labeled. Roots should be included only if they are needed to identify the flowers. Wildflowers can have many different common names . . . a good reason why scientific names should be used when identifying wildflowers.
3. Some wildflowers that youth find in their back yards are either non-native “weeds” or cultivars, which are horticulturally or agriculturally derived varieties of wildflowers, not natural varieties. Therefore, it may be difficult to correctly identify or “key” entries in the wildflower project because the identification guides or keys show native, natural varieties.
4. No protected or endangered wildflower species entries are allowed at county fairs, including flowers picked from private collections. To lessen the possibilities of this, encourage exhibitors and county fairs to use drawings, photos or models rather than real-life samples.
5. Some county fairs say purple loosestrife may not be exhibited because it is a serious threat to Wisconsin’s wetlands and waterways. It displaces native wetland vegetation, degrades wildlife habitat and chokes waterways. Since 1987 state law bans the sale, distribution, planting or cultivation of purple loosestrife.
6. Whenever youth appear to have problems properly identifying wildflowers, or any other plant or animal species, direct them to see local resources that can help with identification, such as nature centers and state parks.