

## Tips for County Fair Judges



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

### FRESH FLOWERS

#### Judging Criteria for Fresh Flower Exhibits

Flowers are judged for how close they are to perfection and how attractively they are displayed. Judge entries on their appearance at exhibit time, not how they looked or will look. 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:

*Foliage:* Leaves should be bright green or characteristic of the flower exhibited, with no yellowing or evidence of disease or insect injury. Markings on variegated foliage should be relatively uniform.

*Stems:* Stems should be straight and strong to hold the flowers upright.

*Flowers:*

- *Color:* Good color is uniform, bright, clear, attractive, and free from feathering, peeling, fading, burning, muddiness, uneven blends, objectionable lines, and marks out of harmony with the basic flower color. Points are deducted for color variation uncharacteristic of the cultivar or caused by cultural imperfection. Insect or disease injury often causes streaking or blotching of color. Sunburn, scorch, bleaching, fading, or spotting caused by water or spray materials are defects. Consider color changes due to fluorescent lights, which often cause reds to darken and look dull and faded.
- *Form:* A flower must have a shape true to its type. Petals in the same ring should be of equal length and the same shape for composite flowers like asters, dahlias, daisies, and zinnias. Double blooms should be deep. Spherical or round forms are ideal for many double flowers. Petals of the gladiolus floret should be recurved to give an open (not hooded) appearance.

Splitting of the calyx, which allows petals to fall through and droop, is a serious defect.

- *Size*: While large flowers are desirable, substance and form are often sacrificed to obtain excessive size. Points are usually deducted for entries that are overly mature when harvested. Sometimes, dahlia and gladiolus societies set up classes based on bloom diameter to avoid such situations in which miniature blooms compete with larger flowers.
- *Condition*: A perfect score for condition is given only to flowers at their ideal stage of development at judging time. Flowers and foliage should be turgid, firm, or crisp, with no evidence of wilting.
- *Substance*: Good substance is indicated by a thickness and firmness of both petals and foliage. These features contribute to lasting quality of the bloom. Points are deducted if tips or petal margins are wilting, curling, fading, or browning. Fully double flowers generally have better substance than ones that are less double.
- *Number*: The number of florets or individual flowers on a stem should be above average for a good score. Generally, one third of the florets on a spike should be open, one third should show color, and one third should still be green. For gladiolus, there are specific requirements for numbers of total buds and open florets. The minimum number of flowers and buds is 11-13 for miniatures and 18-22 for cultivars with larger flowers. The minimum number of open florets is 4-5 for miniatures and 6-10 for larger-flowered types. An additional 6-8 florets should be showing color and the remaining buds should be green for the more common garden gladiolus cultivars.
- *Spacing*: Florets in spike-type inflorescence should be evenly spaced along the stem. Gladiolus florets should face the viewer, in contrast to snapdragon florets that are arranged all the way around the stem. Individual flowers and sprays or trusses should be arranged in an attractive display without gaps.

*Container*: Containers used in horticultural classes serve only to hold material in upright position. Uniform containers are sometimes made available to exhibitors. If exhibitors provide their own containers, they should allow you to examine all specimens without removing them. Containers should not take attention away from the flowers. Exhibitors should avoid low containers except for miniature flowers or short-stemmed flowers. Vertical containers are appropriate for spiked flowers. A general rule of thumb is that flowers be approximately 1½ -2 times the height of their container. For example, a container that is 10 inches high requires stems 15-20 inches above the container rim.

*Arrangement*: A good flower arrangement helps you see all the specimens clearly. Flowers should have stems about the same height, with blooms spaced so that petals do not overlap.

*Uniformity*: If two or more flowers are required for a class, all flowers exhibited should be uniform in size.

## **FLOWER ARRANGEMENTS**

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### **Judging Criteria for Flower Arrangements**

Flower arrangements are judged primarily on the composition of the arrangements – only 20% of the total points are awarded for condition of flowers and foliage. Foliage may be used in flower arrangements, but county fairs say the flowers must predominate. Exhibitors may be required to keep arrangements in attractive condition throughout the fair, replacing flowers when necessary with fresh flowers. Use these criteria when judging:

- *Color Harmony*: Refers to the relation of colors to one another in the arrangement, which makes for a pleasing and unified arrangement of flowers and foliage. Good color harmony should also be evident between plant material and container. Exhibitors should avoid gaudy and unusual containers that detract from the arrangement.
- *Design*: Arrangements should have a definite design with stems arranged to create an attractive effect, such as a triangle, S-curve, crescent, or sunburst. This requires the tasteful use of color, space, texture, and plant shapes.
- *Balance*: Involves the volume and color of plant material, and making sure that the “weight” of one side of the arrangement is equal to the other side. For example, round, globose, red flowers are visually heavy in weight, while light blue spike flowers are visually light in weight. A well-balanced arrangement is stable in appearance and does not appear to tilt to either side.
- *Proportion*: The parts of the arrangement, the plant materials, and the container should be in proper relationship. Size of flowers and foliage and stem length are major considerations.
- *Condition*: Flowers should look fresh and crisp with no wilting or color fading. There should be no evidence of disease or insect injury, or old or wide-open flowers.
- *Suitability of Material and Relation to Container*: Flowers and foliage should naturally belong together. There should be no plastic flowers or foliage, though dried flowers can be effectively combined with fresh flowers. Containers should give rhythm and harmony of shape and color, as well as complement line arrangements.
- *Distinction and Originality*: Look for exhibits that show style that is uncommon, out of the ordinary, and not imitated. The constructive expression of the designer’s personality should be imaginative, inventive, unique, and dissimilar to the rank and file without being bizarre.
- *Construction*: Foliage should be inserted so you can not see the foam, wiring, taping, or other materials used to hold stems in the container. The container’s back should be finished with foliage.

### **Judging Criteria for Flower Bouquets**

A typical bouquet consists of an informal arrangement of flowers in an appropriate container. Miscellaneous material also can be used, such as small filler flowers or foliage from other plants. The quality of fillers and the display of flowers are the important elements of the bouquet. Bouquets are judged for quality in much the same way as fresh flower classes. Elements of floral arrangement also are taken into

consideration. Bouquets should be arranged so that they may be handled without disarranging them.

### **Judging Criteria for Corsage Exhibits**

When making corsages, exhibitors need to consider the occasion, size, and type of corsage, background colors, the season, and the person for whom the corsage is made. Corsages are best presented upright or at a slight angle at eye level. Use these criteria when judging:

- *Design*: The flowers in the corsage should be used in gradation (small, medium, and large) to create depth, rhythm, and interest. The foliage should be an integral part of the design, not just a filler. If a ribbon is used, it should be used for accent or harmony.
- *Distinction, Imagination*: The use of the flowers or featured materials should show marked superiority and creativity in the design.
- *Technique*: The corsage should be tidy in appearance with all wires covered with floral tape and neatly assembled. The design should be secure and light in weight. The back of the corsage should be kept flat with no wires to snag clothing.
- *Color*: The colors should relate well to one another to make a pleasing and unified corsage.
- *Suitable Combinations*: Fresh flowers and foliage should be of long lasting quality. Dried flowers, seed pods, cones, nuts, etc., may be used alone or with fresh material. No plant materials should stain, snag, or have irritating scents. If ribbon is used, it should be water repellent or water resistant.
- *Condition*: All materials should be clean, fresh, and of good quality.