

Evaluating and Judging Flowers and Indoor Plants

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Brilliant flowers and lush plants attract attention—whether they catch the judge's eye at a competition or cause people to look twice at a particular flower garden or potted plants decorating a home.

Flowers and indoor plants for any type of display should be carefully selected, prepared and exhibited. This publication discusses what characteristics are desirable in various classes of flowers and plants, and how you can display them to their best advantage.

Competitions

In garden and flower shows, fairs, and other competitions, flowers and 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 how they'll look in the future. In fact, unworthy entries should not be awarded. If, for example, no entry truly merits a first place, only second and third class ribbons should be awarded.

Exhibit superintendents and assistants should help correctly classify each entry. It is also the superintendent's responsibility to disqualify any entry for not meeting class requirements, not the judge's.

Characteristics of a Good Display

Fresh Flowers

When you select fresh flowers for an exhibit, remember that a judge will evaluate the stem and foliage, the flower, the container, the arrangement, and uniformity of the flowers.

Stems and Foliage

Leaves should be bright green or characteristic of the flower exhibited. Markings on variegated foliage should be relatively uniform. Yellowing or evidence of disease or insect injury will result in point loss. Stems should be straight and strong, holding the flowers upright.

Flower

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 undesired streaking or blotching of color. Sunburn, scorch, bleaching, fading or spotting caused by water or spray materials are also defects that result in point loss. Judges must consider color changes due to the presence of fluorescent lights—these often cause reds to darken and look dull and faded.

Form. Petals in the same ring should be of equal length and the same shape for composite flowers like daisies, asters, zinnias and dahlias. 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. To win all points possible for form, a flower must have a shape true to its type. 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 on the basis of 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 to 13 for miniatures and 18 to 22 for cultivars with larger flowers. The minimum number of open florets is 4 to 5 for miniatures and 6 to 10 for larger-flowered types. An additional 6 to 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 inflorescences 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

Uniform containers are sometimes made available to all exhibitors. In the case, points are not awarded. However, if exhibitors provide their own containers, points are given.

Containers should allow the judge to examine all specimens without removing them. Points will be deducted if the container calls attention to itself rather than to the flowers in it. Avoid low containers except for miniature flowers or short-stemmed flowers. Vertical containers are appropriate for spiked flowers. Containers used in horticultural classes serve only to hold material in an upright position.

A general rule of thumb is that flowers be approximately 1½ to 2 times the height of their container. For example, a container that is 10 inches high requires stems 15 to 20 inches above the container rim.

Arrangement

A good flower arrangement helps the judge clearly see all specimens. 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. Carefully select uniform blooms on stems cut to equal length.

Suggested Scorecard for Fresh Flower Horticultural Classes

	Individual Flowers	Spikes ¹
Stem & Foliage	10	10
Flower		
Color	10	10
Form	10	10
Size	15	10
Condition	15	10
Substance	10	10
Number		10
Spacing		10
Container	10	5
Arrangement	10	5
Uniformity	10	10
Total	100	100

¹e.g. Gladiolus, Larkspur, Bell's of Ireland.

Potted Plants

Two types of potted plants are usually exhibited at fairs and garden shows—flowering plants and foliage (or green) plants. All potted plants must be grown indoors. Plants that show signs of having been recently dug from the garden and potted prior to the show are disqualified.

Flowering plants are judged for their flower display. Plants without open flowers normally do not qualify for an award in a flowering class.

While all foliage plants produce flowers (except ferns), plants in this category are judged for their attractive leaves and stems, since they are primarily grown for foliage. No extra points are awarded to foliage plants with flowers, and these plants are not allowed in flowering potted plant classes.

All potted plants should be free of insects and diseases. Old flowers should be removed from plants prior to competition. Exhibitors must have potted plants in their possession for at least 6 months prior to the show.

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.

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 also 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 on the basis of the number of open flowers and buds present.

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.

Suggested Scorecard for Potted Plants

	Flowering Plants	Foliage Plants
Cultural Perfection	30	35
Form	15	25
Plant Size	15	20
Flower Number	20	
Flower Color	10	
Distinctiveness	<u>10</u>	<u>20</u>
Total	100	100

Flower Arrangements

Flower arrangements are judged primarily on the composition of the arrangements—only 20 percent of the total points are awarded for condition of flowers and foliage. Most arrangements relate to a specific design form, such as a triangle, S-curve, crescent or sunburst. The designer creates a desired arrangement with a specific intent in mind.

Color Harmony

This 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. Avoid gaudy and unusual containers that detract from the arrangement.

Design, Balance, Proportion

Arrangements should have a definite design with stems arranged to create an attractive effect. 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 refers to the proper relationship between various parts of the arrangement and between plant materials and the container. Size of flowers and foliage and stem length are major considerations.

Condition

Flowers should look fresh, turgid or crisp with no wilting or color fading. Points are deducted if there is evidence of disease or insect injury, or for old or wide-open flowers.

Suitability of Material and Relation to Container

This is a very subjective area to judge. However, your best bet for good results is to use flowers and foliage that naturally belong together. Avoid using plastic flowers or foliage, but you can effectively combine dried flowers with fresh flowers. Containers can give rhythm and harmony of shape and color as well as complement line arrangements.

Distinction and Originality

Again, this is a subjective area. Judges look for exhibits that show style that is uncommon, out of the ordinary and not imitated. The constructive expression of the designer's personality is imaginative, inventive, unique and is dissimilar to the rank and file without being bizarre.

Construction

Some exhibits are incomplete because the top of the container isn't covered or the back of the arrangement is left unfinished. Foliage should be inserted so the judge can not see the foam or other material used to hold stems in the container. The container's back also should be finished off with foliage.

Suggested Scorecard for Flower Arrangements

Color Harmony	25
Design, Balance, Proportion	25
Condition	20
Suitability of Material and Relation to Container	15
Distinction and Originality	10
Construction	<u>5</u>
Total	100

Bouquets

Bouquets fall somewhere between horticultural classes and floral arrangements. Thus, the class should be *carefully defined* so all show participants understand the class requirements.

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 horticultural classes. Elements of floral arrangement also are taken into consideration. In fact, most point categories for the bouquet class are the same as for floral arrangements.

Suggested Scorecard for Bouquets

Quality-Condition	40
Design, Balance, Proportion	20
Color Harmony	20
Container	10
Suitability of Material and Relation to Container	<u>10</u>
Total	100

Face-To-Face Judging

A number of fairs and garden shows have instituted, "face-to-face" judging. In this evaluation method, the judge questions the exhibitor about his or her entry. While this evaluation method takes more time and greater organization on the part of the exhibition planner (a schedule of interviews must be arranged), it has several advantages for exhibitors and judges. Exhibitors have an opportunity to ask the judges questions about their entries and the judges' evaluations. Likewise, judges can gain better insight into the extent of work done by exhibitors.

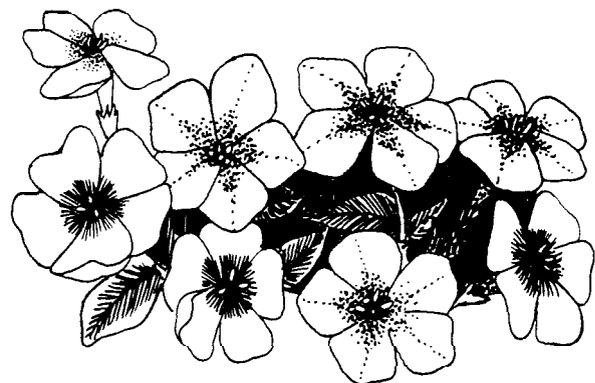
One technique successfully used in this type of evaluation is to ask exhibitors at the end of their interviews what award they believe their exhibits deserve. In most cases, exhibitors and judges closely agree on awards.

Common Garden Show Problems

❑ Bell of Ireland entries with leaves. Judges only can evaluate individual spikes if the leaves are stripped from these entries. Class descriptions for exhibitors and judges should list this as a requirement for Bell of Ireland entries.

❑ Overly mature flowers. Large, round flowers—like marigolds and zinnias—are entered in the wide-open stage. Exhibitors focus a great deal of attention on size and, consequently, often select very mature flowers. If you can look in between the petals of a flower and see its center, then the flower has passed its peak. In extreme cases, browning petals that curl around and under the bloom are also visible.

In addition, spike flowers—like gladiolus and snapdragons—often are harvested overmature. To determine if a spike is too mature, check the lower florets. Lower florets should not be browning. Ideally (in gladiolus), one-third of the florets are wide open, one-third show color and the top one-third are green buds.



❑ Stems cut too short. Stems often are cut exceptionally short on dahlias and marigolds. Make sure stems are long enough for judges to examine both stems and foliage.

❑ One main stem. Coleus and geranium plants grow upright with one main stem. To avoid this, periodically pinch plants during early growing stages to develop bushy, well-branched plants.

❑ Dahlia petals curl or are brown. You can avoid this by harvesting dahlias at the proper time and by careful handling. Brown or curling petals indicate a flower past its peak.

❑ Dark-colored flowers. Flowers that are dark in color may benefit from light shade during their final stages of development.

❑ Entries in the wrong classes. It is not uncommon to find pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*) with the philodendrons, or Swedish Ivy plants in the English Ivy classes. These types of mistakes can be eliminated by having garden show assistants help classify entries.

❑ Terrariums without covers. Technically, terrariums must be closed containers. Entrants without the tops of their containers can be disqualified. Show regulations should clearly define that terrariums must have covers.

❑ Terrariums with unsuitable plants. Terrariums need slow-growing plants. And be sure these plants have similar environmental and cultural requirements.

❑ Foliage shows sign of dirt and lint. Clean indoor plants prior to entry at a show. However, avoid extensive use of leaf polishes or cleaners, because these can give plants an undesirable, unnatural look.

❑ Variations in gardening experience. The gardening experience of participants in youth classes varies widely. This can be eliminated by setting up special classes for members involved in projects more than one year.

❑ Not heeding show regulations. Although show regulations state plants in certain classes must be started from cuttings after a specific date, some entries may have been started from divisions or earlier than the regulation date. Show superintendents or judges should screen plants to make sure they meet show regulations.

Suggested Classes for Fresh Flowers

I. Perennials

- A. **Chrysanthemum**— best 3 stems for 1 or more cultivars
- B. **Dahlia**
 - 1. Miniatures (under 4 inches in diameter)
 - 2. Small-flowered (4 inches to 8 inches in diameter)
 - 3. Large-flowered (8 inches and up)
 - a. Cactus-type flower—display of petals
 - b. Formal—display of petals
 - c. Informal—display of petals
- C. **Daisy** (Shasta type)—best 6 blooms
- D. **Daylily** (*Heemerocallis*)—best single stem
- E. **Delphinium**— best 3 spikes
- F. **Gladiolus** (with or without markings)
 - 1. 1 spike each of three different cultivars
 - 2. 1 spike white or cream
 - 3. 1 spike red or scarlet
 - 4. 1 spike pink or rose
 - 5. 1 spike yellow or orange
 - 6. 1 spike any other color not listed above
- G. **Lily** (*Lilium*)— best single stem
- H. **Phlox**— best 3 stems of 1 or more cultivars
- I. **Rose**
 - 1. Best single stem—any color
or
 - 1. Best single stem—any color—hybrid tea
 - 2. Best single stem—any color—floribunda
 - 3. Best single stem—any color—grandiflora
 - 4. Best single stem—any color—shrub
- J. **Any other perennial flower**— 3 stems of one or more cultivars

II. Annuals*

- A. **Aster**— 6 flowers of one or more cultivars
- B. **Bachelors Button**— 6 flowers of one or more cultivars
- C. **Bells of Ireland**— 3 spikes (without leaves)
- D. **Calendula**— 3 or 6* stems of one or more cultivars
- E. **Cleome**— 3 or 6* stems of one or more cultivars
- E. **Celosia** (Cockscomb type)—3 stems of one or more cultivars.
- G. **Celosia** (Plume type)—3 or 6* stems of one or mixed cultivars
- H. **Cosmos**— 6 stems of one or more cultivars
- I. **Dianthus** (Pinks)—12 stems of one or more cultivars
- J. **Everlasting Flower**— 6 or 12* stems of one or more cultivars
- K. **Gaillardia**— 6 or 12* flowers of one or more cultivars
- L. **Marigold**
 - 1. African (large-flowered types)—3 or 6* flowers of one or more cultivars
 - 2. French (smaller than 1% inches in diameter)—6 or 12* flowers of one or more cultivars

- M. **Nasturtium**— 6 or 12* flowers of one or more cultivars
- N. **Pansy**— 12 flowers of one or more cultivars
- O. **Petunia**
1. Single, plain edged—6 stems of one or mixed cultivars
 2. Single, ruffled—6 stems of one or mixed cultivars
 3. Double—6 stems of one or mixed cultivars or division of classes on basis of color
 4. Single, rose or pink shade—6 stems of one or more cultivars
 5. Single, white shade—6 stems of one or more cultivars
 6. Single, red or scarlet shade—6 stems of one or more cultivars
 7. Single, blue, purple or lavender—6 stems of one or more cultivars
 8. Single, bicolor—6 stems of one or more cultivars
 9. Yellow—6 stems of one or more cultivars

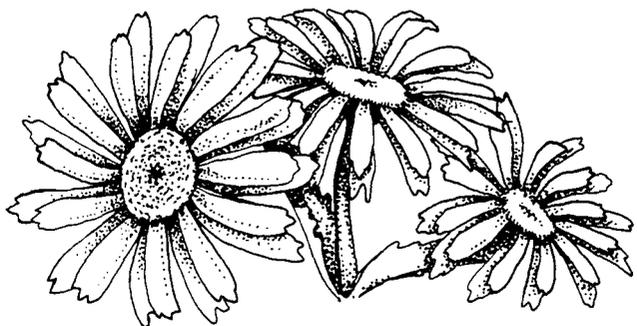
(Note: A stem may contain more than one bloom.

Points will be deducted for old or poorly conditioned blooms allowed to remain on a stem.)

- P. **Salvia**— 6 spikes of one or more cultivars
- Q. **Snapdragon**— 6 spikes of one or more cultivars
- R. **Sweet Peas**— 12 stems of one or more cultivars
- S. **Verbena**— 6 stems or trusses (sprays or clusters of small flowers) of one or more cultivars
- T. **Zinnia**— 6 flowers of one or more cultivars
1. Dwarf (Pompon)
 2. Giant-flowered
 3. Cactus or fantasy
 4. Any other not listed above
- U. Any other annual—6 flowers (less than 2 inches in diameter) of one or more cultivars
- V. Any other annual—6 flowers (over 2 inches in diameter) of one or more cultivars

(Note: The last two classes may permit 6 stems rather than 6 blooms to permit a wider range of material entered in these two classes.)

*When there can be different numbers of flowers in classes or different cultivars (e.g. 3 or 6 flowers of one or more cultivars), the superintendent or other official must make a choice based on show experience and write the show schedule accordingly.



Suggested Classes for Potted Plants

- A. **African Violet** (single crown plants only—1 plant)
1. Blue, purple, any shade—single flower
 2. Blue, purple, any shade—double flower
 3. Red, any shade—single flower
 4. Red, any shade—double flower
 5. Orchid, any shade—single flower
 6. Orchid, any shade—double flower
 7. Lavender, any shade—single flower
 8. Lavender, any shade—double flower
 9. Pink, any shade—single flower
 10. Pink, any shade—double flower
 11. White, any shade—single flower
 12. White, any shade—double flower
 13. Bicolor, any shade—single flower
 14. Bicolor, any shade—double flower
- or
1. Blue, orchid, red, lavender—single flower
 2. Blue, orchid, red, lavender—double flower
 3. Pink or white—single flower
 4. Pink or white—double flower
 5. Any other cultivar—single flower
 6. Any other cultivar—double flower
- (Note: The number of classes will depend on the number of anticipated entries.)
- B. **Begonia**
1. Tuberous rooted
 2. Fibrous rooted (wax)
 3. Angle wing
 4. Rhizome
 5. Calla
- C. **Cactus**— 1 plant, any genus, species or cultivar
- D. **Succulents**— 1 plant, any genus, species or cultivar (jade plants, hen and chickens, aloe, sedum, etc.)
- E. **Coleus**— 1 plant, any cultivar
- F. **Fern**— 1 plant, any genus, species or cultivar
- G. **Fuchsia**— 1 plant, any species or cultivar
- H. **Geranium**— 1 plant, any species or cultivar
- I. **English Ivy**— 1 plant, any cultivar
- J. **Philodendron**— 1 plant, any species or cultivar
- K. **Mixed planter**— 3 to 5 plants (different kinds or cultivars)
- L. **Trailing plant**— 1 plant, any cultivar not listed above
- M. **Vine**— 1 plant, any cultivar not listed above
- N. **Bulb or corm**— 1 plant, any cultivar
- O. **Foliage**— 1 plant, any plant not listed above
- P. **Flowering**— 1 plant, any plant not listed above
- Q. **Terrarium**— a closed container featuring a variety of plants, excluding cacti and succulents
- R. **Dish garden**— an open container featuring a variety of plants, excluding cacti and succulents
- S. **Desert garden**— an open container featuring cacti and succulents
- T. **Plant(s)**— grown under fluorescent light

Suggested Classes for Flower Arrangements

- A. A crescent arrangement of marigolds
- B. Arrangement of annuals for the dining room table using at least 3 kinds of plants
- C. Arrangement of perennials for the dining room table using at least 3 kinds of plants
- D. Dining room arrangement using a combination of annual and perennial flowers and/or fruits and vegetables
- E. Arrangement for a coffee table
- F. Arrangement for a buffet or counter
- G. Arrangement for an end table
- H. Arrangement for a mantel
- I. Arrangement of flowers and 2 or more of the following road-side weeds grasses ferns, berries
- J. Miniature arrangement having a maximum overall height of 6 inches and width of 6 inches including the container
- K. An arrangement featuring driftwood
- L. Thanksgiving arrangement
- M. Fall arrangement
- N. Christmas arrangement
- O. Spring arrangement
- P. Birthday arrangement
- Q. Dried arrangement
- R. All green arrangement



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