

Lavant Horticultural Society

Annual Show 2025

Advice on Showing

This is intended to help you show your exhibits at their best and remove any doubts that might discourage. It may well not answer all your queries, so if you need more information, please contact the Show Contact, Michael Kingsford (01243 527414, e-mail: shows@lavanthortsoc.org.uk) or, on the day itself, the Show Reception or any of the Stewards.

Do not be put off by the descriptions of what judges are looking for – that is perfection. When you select items from your garden or allotment for the show, choose those that come closest. If your runner bean is not quite straight, it remains to be seen how much straighter other entries are; and then they might not compare well with yours on other points.

Do read the wording of the Show Schedule carefully and abide by it. If, for example, the number of items in any exhibit is more or less than specified in the Show Schedule, the judge will immediately disqualify it as “not according to schedule”. The show stewards will be on hand as you stage your entries and will try to point out such errors while they can still be corrected. However, if a lot of people are staging their entries at the same time it may not be possible to spot everything and the state of any exhibit is ultimately the responsibility of the exhibitor.

Some recent examples: garlic with the neck trimmed but not tied with raffia beat opponents with their necks beautifully tied, simply because the garlic was of better quality; tying with raffia helps show the garlic at its best, but is not specified in the Show Schedule; if 2 exhibits had been equal in all other respects, then the one tied with raffia would have edged it. The Show Schedule states that carrot leaves must be trimmed back to about 75 mm. There were two entries of carrots of equal merit. However, the carrots of one exhibit were at least half as big again as the other. Unfortunately, their leaves had not been trimmed back and the smaller carrots won; the larger ones were “not according to schedule”.

Preparing your entries

For the Fruit and Vegetable classes, and also for Flower classes where only one cultivar is being shown, the items that make up the exhibit should be as uniform as possible, in size, shape and colour. So, if you have two really beautiful large beetroot, for example, and a large number of smaller ones, pick out the three most uniform of the smaller beetroot.

Discard anything that has blemishes or damage from weather, pests, diseases or handling.

Cut flowers in the evening or early morning when flowers & foliage are cool and not affected by heat. Cut the stems as long as possible, with a slanting cut to assist uptake of water. Remove any undeveloped side-shoots & unopened buds. Cut stems should be plunged up to their necks in deep containers of clean water, preferably overnight, encouraging the flowers to expand before the Show begins. It is best to keep them in the dark, so that the natural tendency to move towards light does not cause stems to become curved.

If you are entering potted exhibits in classes 28-34, the pot should be clean, undamaged and must not exceed 350 mm diameter inside rim. Also ensure that they have enough water to keep them in good condition for showing.

Staging your exhibits

If possible, bring more than the required number for each class, in case of accidents. Arrive at the Memorial Hall allowing plenty of time – it always takes longer to stage the exhibits than you think and a last minute rush can easily lead to errors. You will be given your entry cards and information about staging your exhibits at Show Reception as you come in.

For cut flower classes you will find the obligatory green plastic vases in the kitchen. Choose a suitably sized one, select the blooms and install them in the vase (not forgetting the water). Cut a portion from the base of each stem to help water uptake, making sure that the length of stem is proportionate to the flower(s) it bears and the vase you are using. You can use tissue etc. down in the vase to keep the stems in place, but no supports that protrude out of the vase. Then take the exhibit to the numbered place for its class on the show tables. Avoid doing all this preparation on the show table, as it can get in the way of other exhibitors. Of course, final adjustments can be made after placing the vase on the show table.

For each vegetable, fruit and flower class, there are paper plates on the show table places, one for each entry in that class. These are there firstly to ensure that enough space is allocated. They should also be used for smaller roundish exhibits (e.g. tomatoes, gooseberries) to keep them in position. Larger vegetable exhibits (e.g. runner beans, rhubarb) and flowers should be placed directly on the show table in the appropriate place and the paper plate removed.

For all exhibits: Place the entry card (the right one!) in front of your exhibit, the side with your name on downwards, so that the side which can be seen shows only the number and name of the class and the entrant's number (& age in the case of juniors). If you have a label with the variety name of your exhibit, place this next to the exhibit or entry card, so that it is obvious which exhibit it refers to and does not get in the way of other exhibits.

You then have to leave the Hall by 10.45 am, taking all your paraphernalia with you, please.

What are the judges looking for?

Flowers

Although no particular score is given for 'arrangement', an attractive presentation that displays the merits of the flowers to best advantage will inevitably, and rightly, make a favourable impression on the judge.

Dahlias

The face view of the bloom should be circular in outline and regular in arrangement and poised at an angle of not less than 45 degrees on a stem that is straight and of a length and thickness that is proportionate to the size of the bloom. Each stem should carry only one bloom - a bud, even unopened, is also classed as a bloom, and must be removed.

The exhibit should be so arranged that all the blooms face forward, are clear of each other with a pleasant and balanced effect.

Roses

The petals should be symmetrically arranged within a circular outline. For a HT/Large Flowered type, the outer petals should regularly surround an upright and well-formed conical and pointed centre. For any other type, the outer petals should regularly surround a central formation typical of the cultivar.

The stem should be straight and proportionate in thickness and length to the size of the bloom with no lateral growth present. The removal of lateral growth is permitted, as is disbudding and deadheading.

Foliage should be undamaged, fresh and clean, of good colour, with no evidence of the use of artificial aids to enhance its appearance. The insertion of additional foliage is not allowed.

Sweet peas

Strong spikes with well-spaced blooms, each one fully open and fresh. Long straight stems in proportion to the size of the blooms.

The following will be marked down: weak spikes with irregularly placed blooms or undeveloped top blooms or blooms showing seed pods; stems crooked or disproportionately short or long for the size of the blooms; stems having fewer than four flowers.

Fruit

All fruit should be shown ripe, except for apples, pears and gooseberries, which may be shown ripe or unripe depending on the season. Over-ripeness is regarded as a defect.

All fruit should have the stalk intact, except for peaches, nectarines and apricots, which should be shown without stalks.

Small soft fruit, e.g. black currants, red currants, must be shown not as individual berries but as complete strigs.

All fruit should have its natural surface bloom preserved (do not polish!).

Vegetables See table on separate sheet

Culinary herbs

Herbs in flower have been marked down because flowering herbs would not normally be used in the kitchen.

*This information has been prepared with the help of 'The Horticultural Show Handbook',
published by the Royal Horticultural Society.*