

Cooperative Extension Service

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Exhibiting Vegetables

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A vegetable garden provides you with fresh produce and an opportunity to learn about plants, and it can also give you much pride and satisfaction.

Exhibiting vegetables at a fair or show gives you a chance to display the results of your efforts. In addition, it can give you the thrill of competing with others and learning about high – quality vegetables. Regardless of the ribbons you receive or the prize money you win, you will greatly profit from your experience at the fair. As an exhibitor, you can become a better vegetable grower and a well – informed consumer; you will also learn the importance of good sportsmanship.

To produce prize – winning vegetables, you need to do the following;

1. Learn about planting and caring for a vegetable garden.
2. Plan to have vegetables available at the right time and in sufficient quantities so you can prepare a good exhibit at fair time.
3. Know the fair rules and regulations, and determine what types of vegetables can be exhibited.
4. Recognize the desirable qualities that the judges look for.
5. Become acquainted with the methods of preparing different vegetables for showing at the fair.
6. Learn the best methods for transporting vegetables to avoid damaging them.

GROWING THE VEGETABLES

If you are an avid gardener, you will enjoy growing vegetables. Naturally, you should strive for the highest quality produce possible. You should pay special attention to planting dates, the selection of varieties, planting techniques, care during the growing season, controlling pests (such as insects, weeds, and diseases), and harvesting the crops at the proper times.

One important factor in growing quality vegetables is the selection of superior varieties. Selecting F1 hybrids and disease-resistant cultivars cannot be stressed enough; in choosing wisely, you avoid many disease problems in the garden. Hybrid cultivars have more vigor, better quality and

yield, and greater disease-resistance than many of the older nonhybrid types. Although F1 hybrids are not perfect, they are generally superior and should be chosen to fit your specific needs.

In addition to having the vegetables at the right stage of maturity for showing, you also need to plant enough of each kind so you can pick and choose from sufficient produce to prepare a top-notch exhibit. For example, you will have a much better chance for a prize-winning entry if you grow ten tomato plants rather than only four.

For more information on planning and planting a vegetable garden, consult *Vegetable Gardening in Illinois* (Circular 1150), other fact sheets in this series, or your local county Extension Advisor.

PLANNING FOR QUALITY AND QUANTITY

Having enough vegetables for exhibition requires careful attention to the time of planting, because this factor determines the time of harvest. Vegetables that are immature or overripe are of little value at show time.

To determine the proper planting date, first check the seed catalog or seed packet for the approximate number of days required from planting to harvesting. Then count back that number of days on the calendar, starting from the opening date of the fair. Mark down this date as the proper time of planting. However, remember that you will probably need to make an additional planting or two (perhaps one earlier and another a bit later), to allow for variations in weather that can aid or hinder plant growth.

Also consult the recommended planting dates for Illinois in Circular 1150, using them as a guide. How early you plant depends upon the hardiness of the vegetable, the days to maturity for the particular variety, and the climate in the area.

RULES FOR EXHIBITORS

Before planning your exhibits, obtain a copy of the fair rules and read them carefully. Pay special attention to the time for submitting entries, the number of entries allowed, the quantities of vegetables needed, and to any other rules concerning the preparation of the exhibits.

Although many fairs and shows operate comparably, there are always some variations. Fair rules also change from year to year, so never assume that last year's rules apply to this year's event.

Vegetables are usually exhibited on plates, in a group display, or as a market basket. The numbers of specimens of each vegetable usually required for a plate are listed below. In a group display, the number of specimens for a particular vegetable should be the same as for the number required for a plate exhibit.

ONE SPECIMEN

Broccoli (head)
Cabbage
Cauliflower
Chinese cabbage (head)
Eggplant
Greens (collard, endive, escarole, kale, mustard, Swiss chard) (1 plant)
Horseradish (root)
Lettuce (1 head or plant)
Muskmelon
Pumpkin
Squash, winter
Watermelon

FIVE SPECIMENS

Asparagus (spears)
Beet
Carrot
Corn, sweet
Cucumber, pickling
Cucumber, slicing
Kohlrabi
Leek
Onions, large, dry
Parsnip
Pepper, large fruited (bell, banana, etc.)
Popcorn (ears)
Potato, Irish, red
Potato, sweet
Rhubarb (stalks)
Squash, summer
Tomato, slicing
Turnip

TWELVE SPECIMENS

Bean, green (pods)
Bean, Lima (pods)
Bean, wax (pods)
Herbs (stems or branches)
Okra
Onion, green
Onion, set
Pea (pods)
Pepper, small-fruited (chili, cherry, etc.)
Shallot
Tomato, small-fruited

WHAT MAKES A GOOD VEGETABLE EXHIBIT?

When selecting vegetables for exhibition, keep in mind that the judges will evaluate them on the basis of cleanliness, uniformity, condition, quality, and trueness to variety.

CLEANLINESS. Only enter vegetables that are clean and bright in appearance. Dirty vegetables create an unfavorable impression and indicate that the exhibitor was not really interested in preparing an attractive, first-rate display. Sometimes you can clean vegetables by washing them, while in other cases, wiping them with a soft, clean cloth, or brushing them lightly with a soft brush is sufficient. Further instructions for cleaning specific kinds of vegetables are given below.

UNIFORMITY. The word "uniformity" as used in connection with vegetables in competition means that each specimen on a plate or each vegetable within a display is of similar size, color, stage of maturity, shape and condition. Judges place considerable importance on uniformity of vegetables exhibited. The larger your supply of vegetables, the better chance you have to choose specimens that are uniform in every respect.

CONDITION. Condition indicates how the crop was grown, harvested, and handled. Vegetables should be free of dirt, cuts, bruises, and defects, as well as insect or disease damage.

QUALITY. This term refers to the prime eating condition of any vegetable but also includes the best color development, shape, texture, and size.

Many exhibitors seem to think that a winning vegetable entry should have huge or even gigantic specimens. Although large size is important in a few classes (e.g. heaviest cabbage, largest pumpkin, or biggest watermelon), considerably less emphasis is placed on large size in most vegetable classes. In deciding on the size of vegetables to exhibit at the fair, think in terms of the sizes most in demand by consumers at the supermarkets. They generally prefer average-sized specimens to extremely large or quite small ones.

Select vegetables that have a deep clear intense color. Avoid dull-colored specimens, or those that are deep colored due to, overripeness. Experience will help you determine the best time to harvest a particular vegetable.

TRUENESS TO VARIETY. Each vegetable variety has its own special characteristics. Therefore, an exhibit should consist entirely of vegetables of the same variety. For example, a plate of four 'Better Boy' tomatoes and one 'Jubilee' tomato (an orange-fruited variety) would certainly make up a plate of fine tomatoes, but it would not be true to variety.

TRANSPORTING VEGETABLES TO THE FAIR

Vegetable specimens that may be damaged while being transported should be individually wrapped in tissue paper or newspaper. Place the wrapped specimens in strong containers, such as bushel baskets or boxes, using large amounts of crumpled paper between layers. Also take along extra specimens for each exhibit, in case something happens to one or more of those chosen for entry in the exhibition.

DESIRABLE CHARACTERISTICS

In addition to being uniform in size, shape, color, and stage of maturity, the vegetables should have certain other characteristics.

The following suggestions may help you select vegetables for an exhibit of competition. These are only general recommendations, and should supplement the exact rules established by your own show committee.

ASPARAGUS

- Straight, dark green spears with tight scales.
- Free of rust, insect injury, or other blemishes.
- Spears trimmed to 7 to 8 inches.
- Clean by wiping with soft cloth, or by washing.
- Display in a shallow pan of water to prevent wilting.

BEAN, LIMA

- Pods well-filled, bright green, tender and fresh.
- Trim stems to ¼ inch
- Clean by wiping with soft dry y cloth; do not wash.

BEAN, SNAP

- Pods tender, stringless, brittle, with seeds in immature stage.
- Free of dirt, rust, blemishes or other imperfections.
- Trim stems to ¼ inch
- Clean by wiping with soft dry cloth or by washing if necessary.

BEET

- Smooth, free of side roots and blemishes.
- Medium to small sizes preferred (1 ½ to 2 inches in diameter).
- Flesh, when cut, should be firm, crisp, and fine-grained.
- Can be displayed with top leaves, or cut down to ½ to 1 inch; taproot should be left on.
- Clean by soaking and washing.

BROCCOLI

- Stalk and head at least 6 inches long, firm, tender, crisp, and with good color.
- Buds tightly closed
- Center head at least 3 inches in diameter.
- Leaves removed below head.
- Clean by dipping in cold water.

CABBAGE

- Head solid and heavy for size.
- Free of blemishes and insect damage.
- Stem evenly trimmed at base of the last leaves left on the head.
- Let outer leaves remain.
- Clean by washing in water or wiping with a dry or moist cloth.

CARROT

- Specimens straight with deep orange, smooth skin.
- Free of cracks, greening, or side roots.
- Tops trimmed to ½ to 1 inch; do not remove taproot.
- Length: short varieties, 2 ¼ to 2 ½ inches; half-long varieties, 5 to 7 inches; long varieties, 7 ½ inches or more.
- Clean by washing; do not scrub. Use a soft brush to remove dirt around the top and in creases.

CAULIFLOWER

- Heads pure white, solid, uniform, with 4 to 6 protective leaves attached.
- Protective leaves trimmed to 1 inch to expose curd.
- Curd should be compact, deep, firm, and at least 4 inches in diameter.
- Stem cut off ¼ inch below bottom leaf.
- Clean by wiping with dry cloth or washing if necessary.

CORN, SWEET

- Ears fresh and well filled from tips to butt ends.
- Kernels plump, soft, tender, and arranged in closely spaced rows.
- Remove “flag” leaves but do not remove husks.
- Clean by wiping with dry cloth.
- Trim stem evenly.

CUCUMBER

- Straight, deep green, with blunt ends.
- Trim stem ¼ to ½ inch.
- Slicing cucumber: 6 to 9 inches long and not over 2 ½ inches in diameter; pickling cucumbers: not more than 3 ½ inches long and 1 ¼ inches in diameter.
- Do not wax.
- Clean by wiping with a soft, dry or moist cloth if necessary.

EGGPLANT

- Specimens firm and shiny, with uniform, deep purple color.
- Small blossom scar and fresh green calyx.
- Trim stem to 1 inch.
- Clean by wiping with soft, dry or moist cloth.

HERBS

- Leaves fresh and tender; free of blemishes, bruises, and insect and disease damage.

- Trim stems evenly.
- Clean by washing if necessary.

KOHLRABI

- Specimens 2 to 3 inches in diameter, and tender with good color.
- Leave 4 to 6 crown leaves, trimmed to ½ inch.
- Cut off taproot ½ inch below the enlarged stem.
- Clean by brushing or wiping with dry cloth.

MUSKMELON

- Evenly netted and free of decay spots, defects, or cracks.
- Smooth stem, indicating harvest at “full-slip” stage.
- Clean by brushing when soil is dry.

OKRA

- Small pods, fresh, bright green, and not over 3 inches long.
- Leave ½ inch of stem.
- Clean by wiping with dry or moist cloth, or by brushing.

ONION

- Firm, mature, well-shaped bulbs, at least 2 inches in diameter.
- Avoid double and split bulbs, and those with soft necks.
- Remove loose or discolored skins; do not peel completely.
- Trim top to 1 inch; trim roots to ¼ inch.
- Clean by washing carefully or by brushing specimens while dry.

PARSNIP

- Roots solid, smooth, well shaped, and 2 to 2 ½ inches in diameter.
- Tapered evenly with no side roots.
- Skin a light, creamy yellow color.
- Tops trimmed to 1 inch; leave taproot on.
- Clean by soaking in water to remove dirt; do not scrub.

PEPPER, BELL

- Specimens firm, thick-fleshed, and deep in color.
- All should have the same number of lobes.
- Trim stems to ¼ inch to ½ inch.
- Clean by wiping with a soft, dry cloth or washing if necessary.

PEPPER (other than bell)

- Specimens with length, shape, and color typical for the variety.
- Trim stems to ½ to ¾ inch.
- Clean by wiping with soft, dry cloth.

POTATO

- Specimens fully mature, clean, and free of insect or disease damage, injury cracks, sunburn, or greening.
- Clean by brushing lightly or washing to remove soil after tubers are dry. Do not scrub.

PUMPKIN

- Good color, thick-fleshed and heavy in weight for size of specimen.
- Free of blemishes and dirt.
- Trim stems to 2 inches.
- Clean by wiping and polishing with a dry cloth or by washing if necessary.

RHUBARB

- Stalks at least 10 inches long and at least 1 inch across at the middle of the stalk.
- Skin smooth and well colored.
- Trim leaves to 1 to 2 inches; trim base evenly.
- Clean by wiping with dry cloth or by washing if necessary.

SQUASH, SUMMER

- Soft rind (immature) and at prime eating stage.
- Avoid overmature, bruised or misshapen specimens.
- Leave 1 inch of evenly trimmed stem attached.
- Clean by brushing or wiping with soft, dry cloth or by washing if necessary.

SQUASH, WINTER

- Outer rind hard and firm.
- Avoid immature, cracked or split specimens.
- Leave 1 inch of stem attached.
- Clean by brushing or wiping with soft, dry cloth or by washing if necessary.

TOMATO

- Firm and free of cracks, blossom-end rot, insect, disease, or mechanical damage.
- Ripe tomatoes should be in prime condition for slicing; avoid overripe fruit.
- Green tomatoes should be entirely green with no red visible.
- Do not exhibit red and green tomatoes on the same plate.
- Display with or without stems.
- Clean by wiping with a moist cloth.

TURNIP

- Roots at least 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches in diameter
- Trim tops to inch; leave tap root 2 to 3 inches long.
- Clean by washing.

WATERMELON

- Typical of variety in shape and color.
- Mature but not overripe; bright or velvety appearance.
- Ground spot should be yellowish in color and not white or pale green.
- Stem 1 inch long.
- Clean by wiping with a moist cloth or by washing if necessary.