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EXTENSION

4H226

Selecting and Preparing Vegetables, Herbs, and Fruit for Exhibits at County Fairs and the Nebraska State Fair



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Exhibiting the produce from your garden can be a rewarding and exciting way to finish a successful gardening season. Exhibiting helps you learn how to show off your hard work and learn how to grow the best fruit and vegetables. Each time you exhibit, you'll learn more about gardening skills and the garden crops you grow. This knowledge and skill will be useful the rest of your life. Ribbons, trophies and prize money are great, but the experience, knowledge, and enjoyment you gain are the most important rewards of successful gardening.

Get an Early Start

Start planning what you want to grow early in the winter or when the plant and seed catalogs arrive. Catalogs offer gardening information and ideas about plant materials. Each year, new cultivars are added to those from previous years. You can't grow them all, but try at least one new crop, cultivar, or technique each year. Keep careful records on the new crop throughout the growing season so you can evaluate its performance at the end of the season.

Outstanding produce can be grown from quality seeds and plants. It is important to select cultivars that are recommended for Nebraska, have good performance records and high yields, and are insect and disease resistant. For suggested cultivars, contact your local Extension Office.

It also is important to have a good selection of produce to choose from at fair time. Part of this includes careful planning at planting time. Consider the number of days required for each crop to mature. If you know the date of the fair, you can calculate planting dates that will allow crops to peak at that time. Since Nebraska weather is unpredictable, it is always smart to make additional plantings before and after the normal planting date for some crops.

Plan Ahead

As fair time nears, review the fair book for entry procedures and regulations for the crops you might enter. Make a list of your garden crops that may be ready. While conditions may change overnight, it's good to know what you might have available. Review the procedures for preparing the produce you may exhibit.

It is important that exhibit produce be at its peak of freshness and quality on judging day. Exhibitors should plan for exhibits that will have the best market quality and will exhibit the highest quality at the time of judging. Some vegetables, fruit, or herbs may not keep for the entire show.

Prepare For Judging

The condition of your exhibit when it is judged depends on how well you followed all the steps in producing a high quality product.

Produce should be harvested and prepared as close to judging time as possible to prevent wilting. Be careful to harvest produce at the proper stage of maturity. Sweet corn that's starchy or broccoli with open florets are past their prime and are undesirable. Likewise, vegetables picked before they are mature (winter squash, pumpkins, etc.) will lack characteristic flavor, texture and nutrients. Harvesting vegetables carefully and at the right time assures top quality for eating, exhibiting, and storing. Vegetables harvested early in the morning generally will remain the freshest.

During and after harvest, avoid mechanical injury. Bruising and breaking the skin of vegetables may allow disease and decay organisms to enter. This kind of damage will detract from the quality of your produce. When you harvest, cleanly cut the stems of vegetables from the plant instead of tearing. The stems of many vegetables will tear away from the fruit when picked from the plant. Squash, cucumbers, peppers and eggplant are a few

that should be cut from the plant to prevent damage. With the exception of tomatoes and muskmelon, all vegetables should be harvested and exhibited with their stems. Leaving the stems on helps prevent moisture loss in the produce. Tomato and muskmelon fruits will separate easily from their stems when ripe. Scar tissue formed at this point (the abscission zone) helps keep the fruit from drying out.

Exhibits can be accidentally damaged by not being securely packaged when transported for exhibition. Wrap produce in soft cloth or paper and store them in containers with packing material around them to reduce movement and potential damage.

Herbs and other produce that require exhibition in containers of water should be carefully secured in containers with enough water to keep the exhibit fresh to avoid drying out. Place the containers into a larger vessel. Use packing material to surround the containers and exhibits for transport. Once exhibits arrive at the fair, add additional water to the containers to help keep exhibits fresh for judging and viewing.

General Judging Criteria

Freedom from Injury

All exhibits should be free of weather injuries, insects, and diseases as well as damage caused by them. Mechanical injuries, such as those caused by rough treatment during harvest, downgrade an exhibit. For example, it is not desirable to show root crops that have been injured while digging or squash with the stems torn off. Look carefully for evidence of mechanical, insect or disease damage and avoid exhibiting those specimens.

Growth Quality

Growth quality is determined mainly by appearance and includes maturity, marketable size, freedom from roughness, and trueness to type.

- Maturity - Produce should be in prime condition for eating at the time of judging. In the case of late season or early fairs, immature specimens usually are included. A higher set of standards should be used for judging immature vegetables, such as green tomatoes or winter squash, if both mature and immature fruits are exhibited in the same class.
- Marketable Size - Produce should be of a size that would sell well at the grocery store or farmer's market. Consumer preferences are important when selling produce.
- Even, Uniform Shapes - Produce should be free from excessive roughness that is caused by crowding in the row or scabbiness caused by insect or disease damage. For example, beets can be very flat-sided if grown in a crowded row.
- Trueness to Type - All exhibits should be as true to the variety, cultivar or type as possible. For example, an elongated beet is not typical of the variety 'Detroit Dark Red' even though such beets may develop from some seeds of that variety. Check the description in the seed catalog or on the packet to be sure your entry is true to type.

Condition

The following factors should be considered when preparing produce for exhibit.

- Freshness - Produce should be harvested and prepared as close to the exhibiting date as possible to prevent wilting and shriveling. If you must harvest vegetables the night before the fair, store them in a cool place such as the basement or refrigerator, depending on the type of vegetable.
- Cleanliness - Bits of soil or other material on produce is unsightly. Clean exhibits with a soft brush or a damp cloth. Avoid excessive scrubbing that can cause bruising. Many vegetables and fruits lose quality if washed. Follow the cleaning instructions for each exhibit closely.
- Trimming - Produce should be neatly and properly trimmed as they would be for market. Specific pointers are given in this manual. Use a sharp knife or kitchen shears to trim.

- Bloom - Some fruits, like plums and grapes, and vegetables like peas, cabbage, and cucumbers, have a natural waxy coating on the surface called bloom. Clean this produce carefully so that the bloom is not removed. The dried up flowers or blossoms on any fruit or vegetable should be removed.

Uniformity

Exhibits should be uniform in size, shape, color, maturity, and type.

- Size- Choose a desirable market size. Remember, the biggest usually is not the best; for many vegetables unusual size often indicates poor quality. For example, do not place four large tomatoes with one small tomato on a plate. Instead, select five medium-sized specimens of equal size.
- Shape- Select the typical shape for which the variety is known.
- Color- Color should be uniform for all specimens of a variety. Specimens with more intense or deeper color usually are preferred.
- Maturity - Specimens should be at similar stages of maturity.
- Type - Produce should be true to and uniform in type.



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VEGETABLES, HERBS & FRUIT GARDENING
SF108

SCORESHEET

Name _____
 Exhibitor ID _____
 Class ID _____

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Improvement
Overall Quality				
Uniformity				
Market Quality				
True to Type				
Fair Preparation				

RIBBON PLACING P B R W

Comments: _____



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General Planting Suggestions for Vegetables

Crop rotation is a good practice to follow when raising vegetables. Rather than putting the crops in the same location every year, crop rotation moves the locations where plants of the same family are placed in the garden. Moving plant families around can help reduce insect and disease damage which tends to increase when the host plant (or family) is continuously grown in the same location. A good crop rotation schedule should rotate the plant families so they aren't grown in the same location for about three to five consecutive years. Knowing what vegetables are related is very important to proper crop rotation.

- Bean (Fabaceae) family- pea; wax, snap, cow, and lima bean
- Cabbage (Brassicaceae) family- cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, collards, kale, turnip, rutabaga, kohlrabi, Chinese cabbage, radish
- Cucumber (Cucurbitaceae) family- cucumber, summer squash, winter squash, cantaloupe, watermelon
- Goosefoot (Chenopodiaceae) family- beet, Swiss chard, spinach
- Lily (Liliaceae) family- onion, garlic, leek, shallot, chive
- Parsley (Apiaceae) family- carrot, celery, celeriac, parsnip, fennel
- Nightshade (Solanaceae) family- tomato, eggplant, pepper, potato, tomatillo

The best way to determine planting date is to check soil temperatures. Seeds have a minimum, maximum, and optimum soil temperature at which they will germinate and seedling growth begins. If planted too early, when soil temperatures are cold, seed germination and seedling growth will be very slow and may lead to seed rotting, damping off disease, or low vigor plants with lower yields. The average last spring frost dates in Nebraska are: eastern Nebraska, April 24; central Nebraska, May 1; and May 10 in western Nebraska. Check with your local UNL Extension Office for the frost-free date in your area. Know what minimum and optimum temperatures are needed for different vegetables and monitor soil temperatures to determine the best time to plant seed. Planting early does not guarantee an earlier harvest if soil temperatures are too cold for germination. Here are some general timelines to follow:

- 60 days before average last spring frost date - collard, onion sets, garden pea, radish, spinach, turnip
- 50 days before average last spring frost date - Swiss chard, leek, mustard, potato
- 40 days before average last spring frost date - beet, cabbage transplants, carrot, lettuce
- 30 days before average last spring frost date - broccoli, Brussels sprout, and cabbage transplants; Chinese cabbage
- 10 days before average last spring frost date - sweet corn, sweet potato, tomato transplants
- Average last spring frost date - bean, cucumber, eggplant transplants, muskmelon, pepper, pumpkin, summer squash
- 10 days after average last spring frost date - okra, watermelon

General Exhibiting Suggestions for Vegetables

Often, new and improved cultivars are better for exhibiting than older cultivars. A recommended variety or cultivar is one that has been tested for a specific location by a competent authority such as a University faculty member, County Extension Educator, or All American Selections. Many new cultivars are released each year and it's impossible to test them all. Gardeners are encouraged to try new cultivars on a small scale to compare them to old varieties. Since there may be great variations in yield, earliness, uniformity, and other qualities, gardeners are encouraged to observe varieties carefully when making comparisons. Check with your local Extension Office for a current list of selected cultivars. Many selected cultivars can be obtained only through seed catalogs. Each specimen exhibited should be correctly labeled with the variety of cultivar name or they will be dropped a ribbon placing.

General Exhibiting Suggestions for Herbs

There are a variety of ways to exhibit herbs because of their different growth habits and uses. There are three ways to exhibit herbs based on their different growth habits and uses. Bulbs, like garlic and onion, should be fully cured and the outside papery sheath should be left on.

Herbs grown for their leaves, such as basil, oregano, mint and lavender, should be exhibited with their stems in a container of water. Leaves should be fresh and tender and free from blemishes, bruises, and insect and disease damage. Many herbs are best when harvested and exhibited before they flower. After herbs flower, the essential oils change and the flavor or scent may not be as desirable.

There are exceptions, since some herbs such as lavender and chamomile are grown for their flowers. The flowers of herbs grown for blossoms should be fresh, of uniform color and development, and free of soil, insect, and disease damage. The stems should have healthy leaves and, as when exhibiting flowers or other herbs in water, **the leaves below the water line should be removed so they do not rot.**

Some herbs such as dill, caraway, fennel, and cumin are grown for their seeds. These seed heads should be loosely tied or banded together and exhibited on a paper plate, not in water. Seed heads should not have shattered. Stems should be harvested when a full head of seed is present and mature, but still slightly greenish-brown so the seeds do not fall off.

Harvest herbs early in the morning for maximum oil content. The essential oils are what give each herb its own distinct scent. If necessary, rinse very gently in cool water. Trim stems evenly and select uniformly sized specimens when more than one stem is required.

Herbs should be labeled with the variety and/or cultivar name. There are few cultivars of herbs; more often they are botanical varieties. For example, there are many different basil, such as sweet, lemon, cinnamon, anise, holy, and sacred, all of which may have more than one strain in the group. There are a few cultivated varieties and most of these cultivars are sweet basil. Some examples include 'Spicy Globe,' 'Green Ruffles,' and 'Green Bouquet.' Use the name that was on the seed packet or on the label if you bought transplants.

Plan ahead and plant herbs so they will be at their peak at the time of exhibition. Some herbs, such as basil, grow very quickly and may be past their prime if planted as soon as the weather warms. You can stagger plant such herbs to get a continuous harvest of premium herbs. Some herbs take longer to develop; some even more than one growing season, such as biennial herbs grown for seed like caraway. Garlic, a perennial, does best in Nebraska if you plant it in the fall and let it grow through the next summer. Harvest garlic as soon as the tops die back. If you plan to exhibit herbs other than those on the list, consult the instructions for a similar herb and follow those.

General Exhibiting Suggestions for Fruit

Growing and exhibiting fruit have some similarities and differences to exhibiting vegetables and herbs. Just like with the vegetable and herb exhibits, the same set of judging criteria is used. The judge is looking for freedom of injury, growth quality, proper condition, and uniformity in the exhibit. The exhibit must display fruit that is representative of the cultivar in size, shape, and be at the proper stage of ripeness at the time of judging.

There are some differences between growing fruit compared to vegetables and herbs that need to be considered. Most fruit will take at least a year, maybe up to 2-3 years, before bearing fruit. Strawberries and brambles require one year to establish a root system. Blossoms and fruit should be removed in the first year of establishment to encourage root growth instead of flower and fruit development. Peaches and apples can take 2-3 years before they begin to bear fruit. Weather plays a major factor in when the fruit will be ripe. Most plants have an average time period when the fruit will be ripe. Each year can vary due to growing and weather conditions, making it difficult to ensure fruit to exhibit every year during fair time.

Follow the directed guidelines for preparing fruit for exhibit and the suggested ways to care for and prepare fruit prior to judging.

Guidelines for Preparing Vegetables for Exhibit

Asparagus - *Asparagus officinalis*

Desirable traits — Select straight, dark green spears with tight scales at tip.

Blanched asparagus should be uniformly white. Spears should be crisp and firm.

Undesirable traits — Avoid crooked stems, loose scales at tip, and spears with insect and mechanical damage.

Preparation — Trim bottom of bunch evenly to a uniform length of 6-8 inches and loosely tie spears in a bunch. Can be displayed in water to prevent wilting.

Exhibit — five stems

Beans (Lima) - *Phaseolus lunatus*

Desirable traits — Uniform, well-filled pods. Harvest when seeds are mature but still tender. Pods should be fresh, bright green.

Undesirable traits — Avoid misshapen or poorly filled pods and those that are yellow, dried, rusted, or have insect damage.

Preparation — Exhibit with stems attached, trim evenly to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Wipe clean with a soft cloth; do not wash. Pick before seeds reach full size. Pod color changes from dark green to light green and they become more starchy as they approach maturity.

Exhibit — 12 pods

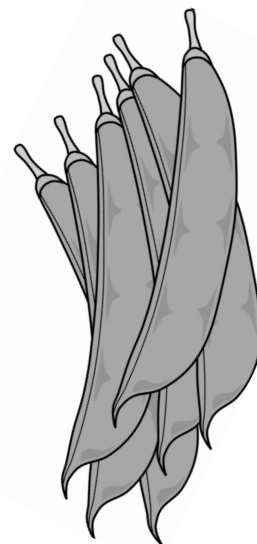
Beans (Dry) - *Phaseolus vulgaris*

Desirable traits — Clean uniform seeds of the same cultivar.

Undesirable traits — Avoid shriveled, cracked, or blemished beans and those showing insect or mechanical damage.

Preparation — Hand sort beans and remove foreign material. Exhibit beans in a clean 1-pint glass jar with lid.

Exhibit — 1 pint



Beans

Beans (Snap and wax) - *Phaseolus vulgaris*

Desirable traits — Straight, fleshy, tender, well-filled pods of uniform length and color representative of the cultivar.

Undesirable traits — Over-large seeds and toughness indicates the bean is too old. Avoid beans with rust and other diseases, as well as mechanical or insect damage.

Preparation — Exhibit with stems attached, trim each stem evenly to $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Brush with soft-bristled brush or soft dry cloth to remove dirt.

Exhibit — 12 pods

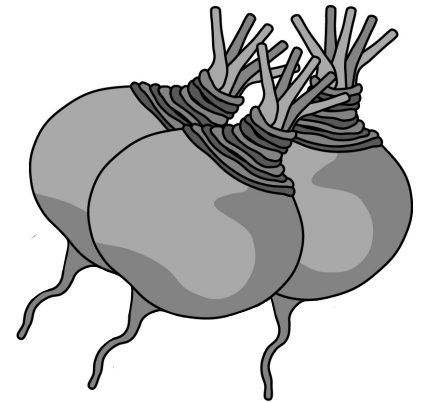
Beets - *Beta vulgaris var. vulgaris*

Desirable traits — Smooth, uniform roots, 1-3 inches in diameter with color representative of the cultivar that are mature, but not overgrown. Specimens should be free of side roots, cracks, and blemishes.

Undesirable traits — Avoid pithy or coarse textured roots that are blocky or angular, those with rough or broken skin, missing taproot, or over-mature roots showing white or light-colored internal rings that are not true to type. Select exhibits that are free from insect or disease damage.

Preparation — Dig roots to avoid mechanical damage. Tops should be uniformly trimmed off $1\frac{1}{2}$ - 2 inches above the crown to reduce wilting. The taproot must be intact while side roots should be carefully removed. Wash carefully, but do not scrub.

Exhibit — five specimens



Beets

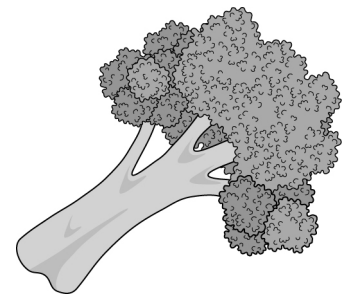
Broccoli - *Brassica oleracea var. italica*

Desirable traits — Choose dark green, crisp heads with tightly closed buds, at least 3 inches in diameter that are representative of the cultivar. Heads should be compact and dense with a few leaves surrounding the head.

Undesirable traits — Avoid over mature, discolored, or wilted heads with open buds or protruding leaves in the heads and those with disease or insect damage.

Preparation — Trim the leaf tips to 1 inch above the head. Soak for 15 minutes in cool salt water and rinse. Salt water will drive out hidden worms so you can remove them. Cut stems of heads evenly to a length of 6-8 inches.

Exhibit — two heads



Broccoli

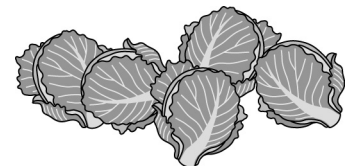
Brussels Sprouts - *Brassica oleracea var. gemmifera*

Desirable traits — Select uniform, medium sized, firm, well-shaped, compact heads that are the correct color for the cultivar.

Undesirable traits — Avoid over-peeled yellow, wilted, shriveled, or insect damaged sprouts.

Preparation — Remove heads from stem and trim stems evenly $\frac{1}{8}$ - $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Two or three outer leaves should be left. Remove those leaves that are damaged, but do not peel excessively.

Exhibit — 12 heads



Brussels Sprouts

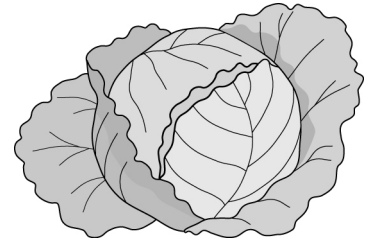
Cabbage - *Brassica oleracea var. capitata*

Desirable traits— Uniform, solid heads that are the correct color and weight for size and cultivar. Heads should have at least one set of wrapper leaves, those curling just slightly at the edge are best.

Undesirable traits— Avoid cracked or wilted heads, those with insect or mechanical damage, over- peeled or shiny heads. Wrapper leaves should be free of worm damage, decay or injury.

Preparation— Cut stems $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ inch below the lowest leaf. Two or three outer leaves should be left on.

Exhibit— two heads



Cabbage

Cabbage (Chinese) - *Brassica rapa var. pekinensis*

Desirable traits— Tight, solid compact heads that are heavy for size about 12-16 inches high and 5-6 inches in diameter with clean, bright colored foliage.

Undesirable traits— Avoid poorly colored, wilted, blemished heads showing signs of insect or disease damage or that have too many outer leaves removed.

Preparation— Trim outer leaves to give heads a tight, cylindrical appearance, but do not over-peel. Keep one or two outer leaves on head. Trim the stem off $\frac{1}{4}$ inch below the lower leaves. Wash in cold water to remove soil and keep refrigerated until ready to exhibit.

Exhibit— two heads

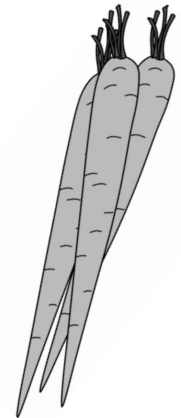
Carrots - *Daucus carota*

Desirable traits— Uniform roots and true to size, shape, and color of the cultivar grown. Select carrots with straight roots with appropriate color for the cultivar, smooth skin, and no side roots.

Undesirable traits— Avoid carrots with immature coloration or green shoulders, those that are too large or small for the cultivar, having pale colored, forked, crooked, or cracked roots, and with insect or disease damage.

Preparation— Dig carrots to avoid breakage. The taproot must be present and side roots should be carefully trimmed. Tops should be uniformly trimmed 1 to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches above the crown. Remove soil by brushing or wash in cold water. Wash carefully, but do not scrub and damage the outer skin.

Exhibit— five specimens



Carrots

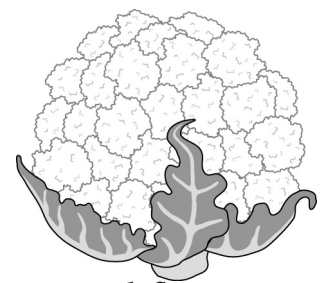
Cauliflower - *Brassica oleracea var. botrytis*

Desirable traits— Firm, compact, heads with appropriate color for cultivar and at least 4 inches in diameter across. Heads should be free of small leaves within the head and have a “jacket” of leaves fresh with uniform color

Undesirable traits— Avoid over-mature, discolored, heads with uneven or loose development. Discolored or injured leaves, insect damage or disease damage, or hollow stem should be avoided.

Preparation— Trim the stem $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch below the bottom leaves and cut straight across. Outer leaves should be trimmed 1 inch above the head. Some of the older leaves may be removed. Soak in cool salt water 15 minutes to drive out the insects and rinse.

Exhibit— two heads



Cauliflower

Celery - *Apium graveolens* var. *dulce*

Desirable traits—Large plants with many crisp stalks. Bright green leaves, uniform color for type, with crisp, firm, thick, and uniform petioles (stalks) held tightly together in a bunch.

Undesirable traits—Avoid pithy, woody, stringy, wilted, or small size stalks, those with blemishes, split stalks, poor color for type, and insect, disease, or mechanical injury. Also avoid diseased and broken leaves and suckers on the outside.

Preparation—The basal end should be trimmed straight across and the roots removed; diseased and broken leaves, small stalks, and suckers on the outside should be trimmed off. The leaves may be partially clipped. Specimen can be washed in cold water or wiped clean.

Exhibit— two bunches

Cucumbers (Pickling) - *Cucumis sativus*

Desirable traits— Specimens with uniform size, shape, color, and maturity. Fruit should be straight, crisp, firm, and have blunt ends.

Undesirable traits— Avoid discolored, over-mature, oversized, misshapen or crooked, puffy fruit, and with insect or mechanical damage. Do not wax or oil fruit.

Preparation— Pickling cucumbers can be harvested in varying sizes depending on the type of pickle being made. Exhibit uniformly sized fruit from 2 ½ to 6 inches in length and 1 ½ inches in diameter. Leave stems attached to the fruit and trim to ¼ inch. Remove dried flower blossoms. Brush, wipe clean, or rinse carefully if cleaning is necessary. The natural spines should be left on. Do not wax or oil.

Exhibit— five specimens

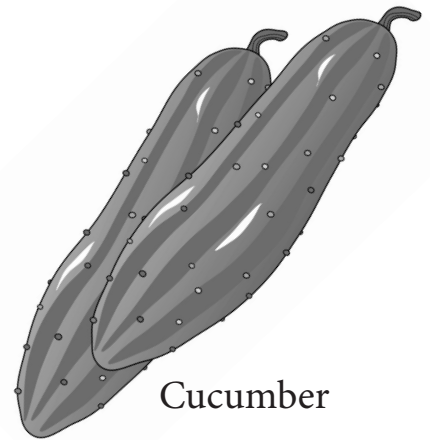
Cucumbers (Slicing) - *Cucumis sativus*

Desirable traits— Straight specimens of uniform size, shape, and color. Fruit should be crisp, firm, and free of blemishes.

Undesirable traits—Avoid discolored, dull, over-mature, over-sized, misshapen or crooked, puffy fruit with insect, disease, or mechanical damage. Avoid pointed fruit or fruit uneven in diameter.

Preparation—Slicing cucumbers should be 6-9 inches long with 2-2 ¼ inches in diameter. Burpless types should be 8-12 inches long by 1- 1 ½ inches in diameter depending on the cultivar. They should be symmetrical and have a rounded end. Leave the stems attached to the fruit and trim evenly to ¼ inch. Brush, wipe clean, or rinse carefully if cleaning is necessary. Do not wax or oil.

Exhibit— two specimens



Cucumber

Eggplant - *Solanum melongena* var. *esculentum*

Desirable traits— Firm, shiny, medium to large size fruit with uniform color representative of the cultivar. Heavy specimens matched for size, shape, and color with a small blossom scar and fresh green calyx (the leaf-like cover on the top of the eggplant fruit).

Undesirable traits— Avoid soft, wrinkly, immature or over-mature fruit, with dull, bronze, or discolored appearance or with a damaged or dried calyx. Dark spots indicate bruises or decay.

Preparation— Leave a stem 1 -1 ½ inches long, cut off cleanly. The calyx should be clean and free of brown edges and insect damage. Specimens should be wiped clean, but not washed. Use caution with white eggplant because they bruise easily. Handle these exhibits very gently. When at the proper harvest stage, light thumb pressure will leave a dent in the skin.

Exhibit— two specimens

Gourds - *Cucurbita pepo*

Desirable traits— Select mature fruits with hard, firm, well-cured rinds. A thumbnail should not be able to dent the rind. Size, shape, and color should be regular, medium size for the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid soft, immature fruits with poor coloring, missing stems, rinds easily punctured with a thumbnail, or those with disease, mechanical, or insect damage.

Preparation— Stems should be attached and trimmed to 1-2 inches. Wipe clean with a soft cloth.

Exhibit— five specimens

Kale - *Brassica oleracea* var. *acephala*

Desirable traits— Dark green, crisp fresh leaves with bright, clean stems

Undesirable traits— Avoid dirty, wilted, poorly colored leaves with insect damage or the seed stalk present.

Preparation— Remove discolored outer leaves and place roots in jar of water.

Exhibit— two plants

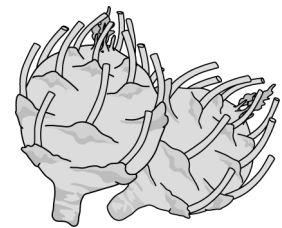
Kohlrabi - *Brassica oleracea* var. *gongylodes*

Desirable traits— Solid, crisp, well-shaped and tender specimens. The ball should be 2-3 inches in diameter, or appropriate for the cultivar, with color that is true to type. Skin should be able to be punctured with a thumbnail.

Undesirable traits— Avoid overly large, tough, dull-skinned, woody specimens with poor color, insect, disease or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Remove all but the top 2-5 leaves and trim these evenly 2-3 inches long. Remove the root ½ inch below the ball. Kohlrabi should be clean, but not washed or wiped heavily.

Exhibit— five specimens



Kohlrabi

Lettuce (Leaf or head) - *Lactuca sativa*

Desirable traits—Leaf or head lettuce may be exhibited, include the entire plant. Head lettuce should have at least two intact wrapper leaves. Exhibits should be crisp, firm, fresh, and representative to a cultivar's form, shape, and color.

Undesirable traits—Avoid plants with old, injured, wilted, dirty, insect, disease or mechanical damaged leaves. Flower stalks are not desired.

Preparation—Select compact young heads. Remove dust or dirt on leaves with water spray or careful washing. Trim the butt of the plant to within $\frac{1}{8}$ - $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of the bottom leaf. Remove older outer leaves that show yellowing. Exhibit with the base of the head in water.

Exhibit— two heads or plants

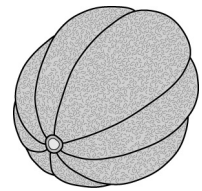
Muskmelon (Cantaloupe) - *Cucumis melo*

Desirable traits— Mature specimens matched for size, shape, color, and netting that are true to type for the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid fruits that are soft, cracked, discolored, have mechanical or insect injury, or are showing symptoms of sunscald. Over-mature or immature fruit or those lacking netting (if netted type) should also be avoided.

Preparation— Fruits should be harvested when they separate easily (slip) from the vines. The stem scar must be dry and free from decay. The melon should have a rich, sweet aroma. Brush clean, if necessary, after the soil is dry, but do not wash.

Exhibit— two specimens



Muskmelon

Okra - *Abelmoschus esculentus* or *Hibiscus esculentus*

Desirable traits—Select straight and tender pods 2-4 inches long, with uniform diameter and length, and uniform color representative of the cultivar. At this young stage, the pods snap easily when bent and are easily punctured.

Undesirable traits—Avoid crooked, hard, over-mature, large, leathery, or woody pods.

Preparation—Select young pods with proper coloration. Leave stems attached and trim to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.

Exhibit— five specimens



Okra

Onions (Mature) - *Allium cepa*

Desirable traits—Uniform, well-cured, mature, well-shaped, solid bulbs with at least one clean, dry outer scale. Scale color should be bright and typical of the cultivar. Ideal bulb diameter is 2-4 inches.

Undesirable traits—Avoid slick, immature, misshapen, poorly colored, over-peeled onions with soft necks, sprouts, bruises, sunscald, double or split bulbs, disease or insect damage.

Preparation—After digging, spread onions in a warm, airy, dark location to cure. Cure bulbs at least two weeks before exhibiting. While curing, check each onion to make sure there is no rot present. Stems should be 1 inch or less in diameter and trim stems 1 inch above the bulb. Small basal roots should be left intact, but trimmed to a uniform length of $\frac{1}{4}$ inch. Wipe or brush off dry soil, but do not wash. Remove only the outer scales that are broken or discolored.

Exhibit— five specimens

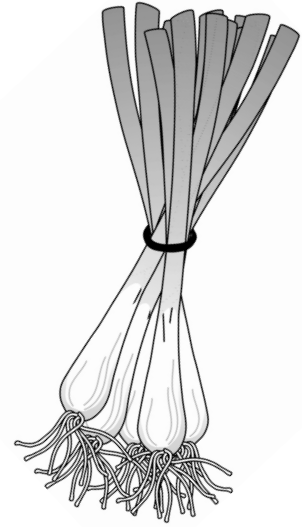
Onions (Green) - *Allium cepa*

Desirable traits—Dark green leaves with long, straight, slender, white shanks.

Undesirable traits—Avoid crooked or discolored shanks, dry or yellow leaves, or overly peeled or enlarged bulbs.

Preparation—Remove outer wrapper skin to expose the long white shank. Trim the tops to 3 inches long. The overall length should be 7-10 inches long. Trim roots to ¼ inch. The diameter of the onions should be no more than 1 inch.

Exhibit— one bunch of five onions



Onions

Parsnips - *Pastinaca sativa*

Desirable traits—Clean, medium to large sized, smooth, well-shaped roots, with uniform tapering, light, even-colored skin, and firm flesh.

Undesirable traits—Avoid small, misshapen, soft, or woody roots, those with green shoulders, insect or mechanical damage, discoloration, or side roots.

Preparation—Select roots that are medium to large size, less than 2 inches in diameter, and 7 inches long. Trim tops to 1- 1 ½ inches above the crown. Roots may be carefully washed, but not scrubbed so that the outer skin is injured. Trim off side roots, but the taproot should be left intact.

Exhibit— five specimens

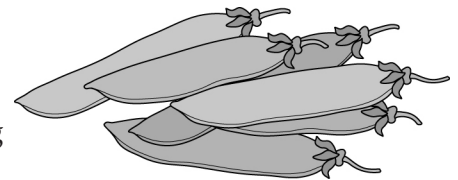
Peas (Edible pod) - *Pisum sativum*

Desirable traits—Tender, flat pods with seeds just beginning to form, bright green color.

Undesirable traits—Avoid tough pods or those with maturing seeds, insect, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Pods should be picked carefully and handled as little as possible to avoid removing the waxy coating or “bloom.” Pick and exhibit peas with the stems on, trimming evenly to ¼ inch. Use a soft-bristled brush to remove soil, but do not scrub.

Exhibit— 12 specimens



Peas

Peas (Shelling or garden) - *Pisum sativum*

Desirable traits— Bright green, well-developed pods with seeds at the best eating stage for the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid poorly filled, overly mature, shriveled, yellowed or discolored pods or those with tough, shriveled, starchy, bitter tasting peas.

Preparation— Pods should be picked carefully and handled as little as possible to avoid removing the waxy coating or “bloom.” Pick and exhibit peas with the stems on, trimming evenly to ¼ inch.

Exhibit— 12 specimens

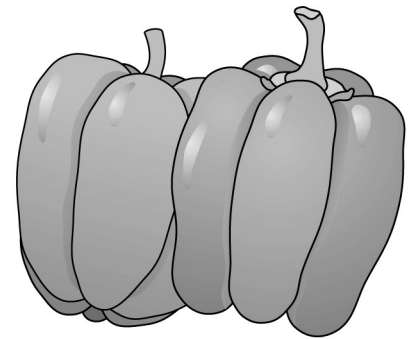
Pepper (Bell Type) - *Capsicum annuum*

Desirable traits—Firm, crisp specimens with thick flesh showing uniform color, correct for the cultivar. All fruits should be the same size, color, shape, and have the same number of lobes (2, 3 or 4).

Undesirable traits—Avoid immature, wrinkled, or misshapen specimens. Sunburn, blemishes, mechanical, insect, or disease damage is not desired. Specimens with traces of contrasting or non-representative color should be avoided.

Preparation—Stems should be left on and trimmed evenly to ½ inch long. If cleaning is necessary, wipe with a soft dry cloth.

Exhibit— five specimens



Bell Pepper

Pepper (Other Types) - *Capsicum annuum*

Desirable traits— Firm, crisp specimens with thick flesh showing uniform color and shape correct for the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid immature, wrinkled, or misshapen specimens. Sunburn, blemishes, mechanical, insect, or disease damage is not desired. Specimens with traces of contrasting or non-representative color of the cultivar should be avoided.

Preparation—Stems should be left on and trimmed evenly to ½ inch long. If cleaning is necessary, wipe with a soft dry cloth.

Exhibit— five specimens



Hot Pepper

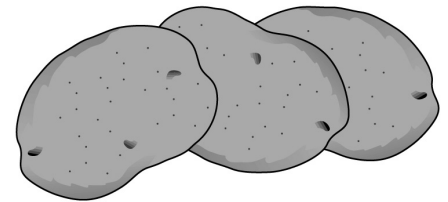
Potatoes - *Solanum tuberosum*

Desirable traits— Uniform, clean, medium sized specimens that are true to type. Skin should be firm, well-cured, free from blemishes and soil, insect and mechanical damage, and peeling.

Undesirable traits— Avoid potatoes with poor coloration, growth cracks, second-growth bumps, blemished, diseased, or damaged skin. Do not select potatoes with sunburn or green coloring, which is from exposure to light; or enlarged white lenticels (breathing pores), a sign that they were grown in poorly drained soil.

Preparation— Remove the vine two weeks before harvest. Dig tubers carefully to avoid cuts and bruises. Brush or wipe with a soft cloth after the tubers are dry to remove soil, do not wash or scrub. Store in a cool, dark place.

Exhibit— five specimens



Potatoes

Pumpkin - *Cucurbita pepo*

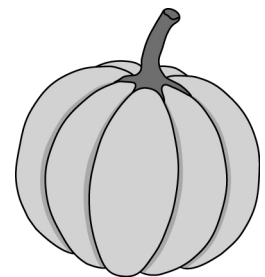
Desirable traits— Mature and uniform in size, shape, and color for the cultivar with thick flesh, and hard, thin, clean rind.

Undesirable traits— Avoid lightweight pumpkins with a distinctively flat side, thin flesh, blemishes, insect or disease damage, scabs, or soft skin or those with coloration or shape that is not true to type.

Preparation—If the pumpkin is light for its size or is flat on one side, the flesh is probably too thin. Stems should be attached and trimmed neatly at the point where they attach to the vine. Pumpkins should have a sturdy stem. Do not carry pumpkin by the stem. If cleaning is necessary, wipe pumpkins clean with a cloth, but do not wash.

Exhibit—Large field (jack-o'-lantern type and pie types)- two specimens

Miniature pumpkins (Jack-Be-Little type)- five specimens



Pumpkin

Radish - *Raphanus sativus*

Desirable traits— Smooth, crisp, firm, uniform, bright-colored, roots free of blemishes, and insect or mechanical damage. Select radishes of medium size, 5/8 - 1 inch in diameter. Color, size, and form should be typical of the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid radishes with spongy, soft, rough, blemished, wilted, or poorly-colored roots. Also avoid those with oversized or split roots and with insect or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Trim the tops evenly to 1 inch above the crown. Leave the taproot intact. Roots can be gently washed in cool water.

Exhibit— five specimens

Rhubarb - *Rheum rhabarbarum*

Desirable traits— Stalks (petioles) should be crisp, tender, straight, free of any blemishes or damage, and be uniform in size, length, and color for the cultivar. The bases of the leaf stalks should be clean and free of any soil.

Undesirable traits— Avoid poor colored, tough, wilted stalks, with insect or mechanical damage, or blemishes, and those with the lower end cut,

Preparation— The stalk should be pulled, not cut, from the plant and the leaves trimmed so only 1 inch of the leaf blade remains attached to the petiole. Remove the small bracts at the base of each stalk. If cleaning is necessary, wipe clean with a cloth or wash gently. Loosely tie the bundle of stalks at both ends.

Exhibit— one bunch of five stalks tied at both ends



Rhubarb

Rutabaga - *Brassica napobrassica*

Desirable traits— Uniform, smooth specimens 3-5 inches in diameter.

Undesirable traits— Avoid over-grown, pithy, or coarsely textured roots with mechanical or insect damage.

Preparation— Side roots should be carefully trimmed, but the taproot should remain intact. Carefully wash the roots, but do not scrub and injure outer skin.

Exhibit— 2 specimens

Salsify - *Tragopogon porrifolius*, *Scorzonera hispanica*

Desirable traits— Straight, smooth roots at least 6 inches long and 1- 1 ½ inches in diameter at the top.

Undesirable traits— Avoid soft or shriveled roots with mechanical or insect damage.

Preparation— Remove tops neatly and evenly 1- 1 ½ inches above the crown. Carefully remove rootlets and side roots but leave the taproot intact.

Exhibit— five specimens

Spinach - *Spinacea oleracea*

Desirable traits— Exhibit intact plants with the appropriate color for the cultivar with clean, large, crisp, broad, thick, fresh, undamaged leaves.

Undesirable traits— Avoid leaves that are wilted or poorly colored and those damaged from insects, disease or mishandling.

Preparation— Pull the entire plant and remove the outer damaged leaves. Trim the base 1/8 - 1/4 inch from the bottom leaf and exhibit in water to avoid wilting. Gently wash to remove soil.

Exhibit— two plants

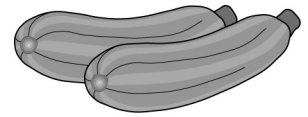
Squash (Summer) - *Cucurbita pepo*

Desirable traits— Select specimens true to type in size, shape, and color. Long-fruited varieties (zucchini-type) should be 4 to 8 inches in length. Flat or scalloped types should be 3 to 5 inches in diameter.

Undesirable traits— Avoid large, over-mature, soft fruits, with missing stems, disease or insect damage, or blemishes.

Preparation—Harvest at an immature stage when the rind is easily punctured with thumbnail. Handle fruit carefully to avoid bruising. Cut from the vine and leave about ½ inch of stem, neatly trimmed. Select clean specimens and remove flecks of soil by brushing lightly. Do not wash or wipe.

Exhibit— two specimens



Squash

Squash (Winter) *Cucurbita pepo*, *Cucurbita maxima*

Desirable traits— Select squash with mature hard, firm, well-cured rinds. A thumbnail should not be able to dent the rind. Size, shape, and color should be medium size for the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid soft, immature fruits with poor coloring, missing stems, rinds easily punctured with a thumbnail, or those with disease, mechanical, or insect damage.

Preparation— Yellowish ground spot indicates ripeness. Stems should be attached and trimmed to 1-2 inches. Wipe clean with a soft cloth.

Exhibit— two specimens

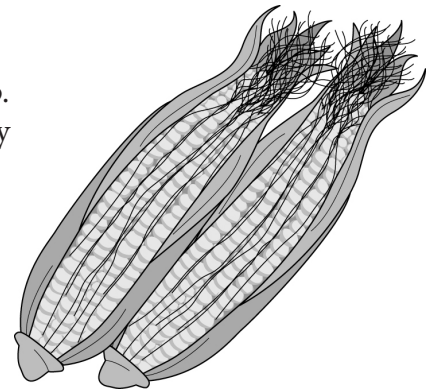
Sweet Corn - *Zea mays*

Desirable traits— Select plump, straight, uniform ears that are well-filled to the tip. Husks should be fresh, green, and fit tightly around the ear. Kernels should be fully grown in the young milk stage with good color.

Undesirable traits— Avoid ears that are poorly filled or not filled to the tip, crooked, have yellow husks, or have kernels that are immature or over-mature and doughy or watery. Avoid worm, bird, or insect damage and insect frass or droppings, which can indicate corn earworms are present.

Preparation—Leave the husks on and do not cut any “windows” in the husks. Remove only loose husks. Trim silk 1 inch from tip of husk and the shank 1-2 inches from base of the ear.

Exhibit— five specimens



Sweet Corn

Sweet Potatoes - *Ipomoea batatas*

Desirable traits— Smooth, bright, well-shaped, and well-colored roots. Length should be 2-3 times longer than diameter.

Undesirable traits— Avoid misshaped, rough, off color, bruised roots with sprouts, or evidence of nematode, insect, mechanical, or disease damage.

Preparation— Dig roots early enough to cure well before exhibiting. Curing should take 7 to 10 days. Skin must be firm, well-cured, and clean. Clean the roots by brushing or wipe with a soft, dry cloth when the soil has dried. A short stem and about 1 inch of taproot should be attached. Remove all “hair” roots.

Exhibit— five specimens

Swiss Chard - *Beta vulgaris* var. *cicla*

Desirable traits— Leaves should be large, clean, broad, crisp, and fully expanded with bright, tender, fleshy leaf stalks with color representative of the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid wilted, poorly colored leaves showing insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Rinse in cold water. Exhibit with stems immersed in a jar of cold water to prevent wilting.

Exhibit— five leaves

Tomatoes - *Lycopersicon esculentum* or *Solanum lycopersicum*

Desirable traits— Firm, evenly colored, mature, uniform in size, and shape that are true to cultivar and heavy for the size with small blossom scars.

Undesirable traits— Avoid over-mature specimens with poor color, sunscald, blemishes, puffiness, growth cracks, disease, insect, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Mature fruits with diameters of 2- 3 ½ inches are most desirable for many of the medium to large round-fruited varieties. To clean, wipe gently with a soft cloth. Always remove the stems when harvesting to avoid injury to other fruit.

Exhibit— Standard type fruit (2 inches or more in diameter including slicing, plum or sauce type)—five specimens

Salad type fruit (under 2 inches in diameter including cherry, pear, or grape types)—12 specimens

Turnips - *Brassica rapa* var. *rapifera*

Desirable traits— Smooth, well-formed, and tender fleshed roots of uniform size and shape with matched color patterns true to cultivar. Select medium size roots 1-2 inches in diameter.

Undesirable traits— Avoid poorly colored, soft, spongy, overgrown, pithy, coarsely textured, irregularly-shaped, or forked roots and those with insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Trim the tops to 1 to 1 ½ inches above the crown. Carefully remove small side roots, but leave taproot intact. Roots may be carefully washed, but do not scrub and injure the outer skin.

Exhibit— five specimens

Watermelon - *Citrullus lanatus*

Desirable traits— Mature, ready-to-eat fruit that have the size, shape, and color typical of the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid over or immature, misshaped fruit with sunburn, blemishes, insect, or disease damage.

Preparation— Yellowish ground spot indicates ripeness. Icebox types should weigh 4-8 pounds, with the large types weighing up to 50 pounds. Leave about 1 inch of stem on each melon. To clean, wipe with a soft cloth

Exhibit— two specimens

Guidelines for Preparing Herbs for Exhibit

Anise - *Pimpinella anisum*

Desirable traits— Heads should be 3 to 5 inches across with well-filled seeds.

Undesirable traits— Avoid over-mature or shattering seedheads and immature stems without a “head” of seeds.

Preparation— Outer spreading leaves should be removed and the base trimmed and cut cleanly with a sharp knife. Overall length should be 10-12 inches.

Exhibit— five sprigs per bottle

Basil - *Ocimum basilicum*

Desirable traits— Leaves should be glossy and well-developed on stems 6-10 inches long, of uniform size and development, with characteristics representative of the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid flowering stems, leaves that are discolored, dirty, or have insect or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Cut stems with scissors and place cut ends in cool water. Stems can be gently rinsed in cool water. Use caution because basil bruises very easily. Exhibit with stems in a container of water. Remove leaves below the water line.

Exhibit— five sprigs per bottle

Dill - *Anethum graveolens*

Desirable traits— Seedheads should be green-brown to brown in color, mature, and ready to use. Stems that are tender and green are desired.

Undesirable traits— Avoid immature stems with no “head” of seeds or dry, over-mature stems losing seeds.

Preparation— Cut seed heads with 10-12 inch stems and loosely tie at base and again near seed head.

Exhibit— five seedheads tied near lower end of stems and again just below seed heads

Garlic - *Allium sativum*

Desirable traits— Late garlic has bulbs that are smoother with cloves that are smaller and more numerous than early garlic. Cloves of early garlic are tan, while cloves of the late type are pink or pinkish brown. Either is suitable for exhibiting.

Undesirable traits— Avoid peeled, dirty, or otherwise damaged bulbs.

Preparation— Garlic should be well-cured when exhibiting. Select fairly smooth bulbs with small, well-dried necks, trimmed to 1 inch. Roots should be trimmed to a uniform length of ¼ inch below the bulb. Wrapper leaves should be intact, clean, and white.

Exhibit— five specimens

Mint - *Mentha species*

Desirable traits— Succulent stems 6-10 inches long and uniform in size and development. Stems may have blooms, but development should be uniform.

Undesirable traits— Avoid dirty, insect or disease damaged leaves, and stems that are not uniform in size and development.

Preparation— Cut stems with scissors and place cut ends in cool water. If stems are dirty, rinse gently in cool water. Display in a container of water with foliage removed below the water line to prevent rotting.

Exhibit— five sprigs per bottle



Dill



Garlic

Oregano - *Origanum vulgare*

Desirable traits— Stems should be 4-8 inches long, uniform in size and development, and representative of the cultivar. Flavor is best before plants bloom.

Undesirable traits— Avoid flowering stems and leaves that are dirty or have insect or disease damage.

Preparation— Cut stems and place in cool water. If dirty, gently rinse in cool water, but handle carefully as oregano leaves bruise easily. Exhibit with stems in a container of water. Remove the leaves below the water line to prevent rot.

Exhibit— five sprigs per bottle

Parsley - *Petroselinum crispum*

Desirable traits— Fresh and tender leaves representative of the cultivar with stems in compact, straight bunches.

Undesirable traits— Avoid dirty leaves and stems with insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Trim stems evenly with an overall length of 8-10 inches. Clean leaves by swishing in water. Stems should be exhibited with the cut ends in water.

Exhibit— five sprigs per bottle

Sage - *Salvia officinalis*

Desirable traits— Stems should be 6-10 inches long with uniform size and development. Stems may have blooms, but development should be uniform.

Undesirable traits— Avoid dirty stems with insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Cut stems and place in cool water. If leaves are dirty, gently rinse in cool water, but handle carefully as sage bruises easily. Exhibit with stems in a container of water. Remove the leaves below the water line to prevent rot.

Exhibit— five sprigs per bottle

Thyme - *Thymus vulgaris*

Desirable traits— Tender, green, 6-8 inch long stems uniform in size and development. The flavor is best before plants bloom.

Undesirable traits— Avoid dirty, woody, diseased, or insect damaged stems.

Preparation— Snip stems and rinse gently in cool water. Exhibit with cut ends in a container of water with leaves below the water line removed to prevent rotting.

Exhibit— five sprigs per bottle

Any other herb

Desirable traits— Fresh, clean, herbs at the proper harvest stage for use. For herbs grown for seed, see the instructions for dill. Herbs grown for leaves generally should be harvested before they bloom. Herbs grown for flowers should be in bloom at the time of exhibiting

Undesirable traits— Avoid herbs with dirty, wilted leaves and stems, at the improper stage for use, or those with signs of insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Display in a container of water with foliage removed below the water line to prevent rotting. If dirty, rinse gently in cool water.

Exhibit— five sprigs per bottle

Guidelines for Preparing Fruit for Exhibit

Apples and Pears - *Malus domestica* and *Pyrus communis*

Desirable traits— Uniform, medium sized fruits with good color and shape typical for the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid fruits with insect, disease, or mechanical injuries.

Preparation— Handle with care since fruits bruise easily. Leave stems attached but clip the end short enough so it cannot puncture other specimens in the display.

Polish with dry cloth.

Exhibit— five specimens

Grapes - *Vitis vinifera*

Desirable traits— Bunches uniform in size and color with fruits that are plump, fresh-looking, firm, compact, and uniformly ripened. All grapes must be firmly attached to the stem.

Undesirable traits— Avoid fruit with broken skins or showing signs of insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Deep color for the cultivar indicates good quality and sugar content. Avoid skin breaks on the grapes. Preserve as much of the natural “bloom” as possible, rinse quickly with water to remove dust. Do not soak, fruits may split from absorbing water.

Exhibit— two bunches

Peaches - *Prunus persica*

Desirable traits— Uniform, medium sized fruits with good color and shape typical for the cultivar. Ideal size should be 2 ½ to 3 ½ inches in diameter

Undesirable traits— Avoid over-ripe or immature fruit and those with insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Clean, but do not wash the fruit. Use caution as peaches bruise easily. Remove stems so they cannot puncture other specimens in the display. Remove dust with soft brush.

Exhibit— five specimens

Raspberries and Blackberries - *Rubus idaeus* and *Rubus* species

Desirable traits— Fruit uniform in ripeness size and shape, with color representative of the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid over-ripe fruit and those with insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Clean, but do not wash the fruit. Remove dust with soft brush.

Exhibit— one pint

Strawberries - *Fragaria x ananassa*

Desirable traits— Firm, uniform, fully ripe fruit and free of any injury. Size, shape, and color should be representative of the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid immature or over-mature, injured, or stemless fruit or fruit with insect or disease damage.

Preparation— Leave stems and “cap” attached to prevent moisture loss. Clean with a soft artist’s brush. Do not wash.

Exhibit— one pint

Any other small fruit and berries

Desirable traits— Fruit uniform in ripeness with size, shape, and color representative of the cultivar.

Undesirable traits— Avoid over-ripe fruit and those with insect, disease, or mechanical damage.

Preparation— Clean, but do not wash the fruit. Remove dust with soft brush.

Exhibit— one pint

Resources

Additional information related to University of Nebraska—Lincoln Extension and from the following UNL sources:

Extension Publications

<http://ianrpubs.unl.edu>

Horticulture Resources

<http://environment.unl.edu>

Nebraska 4-H

<http://4h.unl.edu>

402-472-2805

Plant & Pest Diagnostic Clinic

<http://pdc.unl.edu/diagnosticclinics/plantandpest>

402-472-2559

Backyard Farmer

<http://byf.unl.edu>

UNL Turfgrass

<http://turf.unl.edu>

UNL Drought Resources

<http://droughtresources.unl.edu>

Quick Reference

Exhibit	Suggested Exhibit Quantity
Apples	5 specimens
Beans (lima, snap, & wax)	12 specimens
Beans (dry)	1 pint
Beets	5 specimens
Broccoli	2 heads
Brussels Sprouts	12 heads
Cabbage	2 heads
Carrots	5 specimens
Cauliflower	2 heads
Cucumbers	pickling: 5 specimens slicing: 2 specimens
Eggplant	2 specimens
Grapes	2 bunches
Gourds	5 specimens
Herbs	5 specimens
Kohlrabi	5 specimens
Muskmelon (Cantaloupe)	2 specimens
Okra	5 specimens
Onions	5 specimens
Parsnips	5 specimens
Pears	5 specimens
Peppers	5 specimens
Potatoes	5 specimens
Pumpkin	larger: 2 specimens miniature: 5 specimens
Radish	5 specimens
Rhubarb	5 specimens
Rutabaga	5 specimens
Squash (summer and winter types)	2 specimens
Strawberries	1 pint
Sweet Corn	5 specimens
Swiss Chard	5 specimens
Tomatoes	2" or more in diameter: 5 specimens less than 2" in diameter: 12 specimens
Turnips	5 specimens
Watermelon	2 specimens

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