

Exhibiting and Judging VEGETABLES

H.C. Harrison

A good vegetable display attracts attention – whether it interests the judge at a competition or catches the consumer’s eye at a roadside stand or in the grocery store.

Vegetables for any type of display should be carefully selected, prepared and exhibited. The characteristics of each vegetable that attract the judge and make for a winning exhibit are the same characteristics that make vegetables attractive to consumers.

While this publication is directed to the fair exhibitor, the information within also applies to vegetable vendors.

Why Exhibit?

Displaying your crops is one way you can take pride in having produced top quality vegetables. While gardening is a fun, relaxing way for the entire family to spend time together and save money by growing fresh produce, you can increase the enjoyment you get from gardening by trying to grow new, different kinds of crops. Your work – those top-notch vegetables – attracts attention. Take pride in your accomplishment.

Growing the Vegetables

Selecting and preparing vegetables for display is much easier if you *plan*. Begin planning early in the year so you can get the type and quantity of seed you need. Pay special attention to planting dates, which variety you select, when and how much to fertilize, spacing and thinning of plants, controlling insects, weeds and diseases, and harvest dates.

Selecting plant varieties is important to growing quality vegetables. Select F₁ hybrids and disease-resistant cultivars to avoid many disease problems in your garden. Frequently, hybrid cultivars are more vigorous, produce larger yields of higher quality produce, and have greater disease resistance than many non-hybrid varieties.

For more information on planning and planting a vegetable garden, go to <http://learningstore.uwex.edu> or ask your county Extension Agent for available gardening bulletins. The more popular bulletins on this topic *Vegetable Cultivars and Planting Guide for Wisconsin Gardens (A1653)*, *Managing Insects in the Home Vegetable Garden (A2088)*, *The Vegetable*

Garden (A1989), and *Growing Vegetables at Home – Questions and Answers (A2801)*.

Planning for Quality and Quantity

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

To determine the right planting dates, check the seed catalog or packet for the approximate number of days required from planting to harvest. Then, starting from the opening date of the fair, count back that number of days on the calendar. Mark this date as the targeted planting date. Also remember that when you plant depends on the hardiness of the vegetable, the days to maturity of a particular variety, and the climate in your area.

In addition, you should probably make two other plantings – one earlier and one a bit later – to allow for variation in the weather that can aid or hinder plant growth. You should also plant enough of each vegetable so you can be choosy about which vegetables you want to show in order to prepare a top-notch exhibit.



Harvest more vegetables than you actually need for your exhibit to ensure a good selection. And take along a few extra vegetables to the exhibit location in case some of your exhibit vegetables are damaged in transit.

To know when to harvest your vegetables, check *Harvest Vegetables from the Home Garden* (A2727).

Exhibit Requirements

When you are preparing vegetables for fair competition, be sure that the vegetables meet all premium list requirements. Read and follow the exhibit rules and regulations carefully. Never assume that last year's rules apply this year, because rules may change from year to year.

Exhibit requirements normally specify the class or kind of vegetables you can show; the number of specimens; the type, shape or size of containers; the size, shape, color and stage of maturity of individual vegetables; and whether the exhibit is to be an individual one or part of a larger display. The exhibit rules also give the time the exhibit must be ready for judging.

Vegetables are usually exhibited on plates, in a group display or as a market basketful. For a plate exhibit or a group display, the numbers of specimens usually required for each vegetable are listed below.

Required Numbers of Individual Vegetables*

1 SPECIMEN

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



4 SPECIMENS

Asparagus (spears)
Beet
Carrot
Corn, sweet
Cucumber, pickling
Cucumber, slicing
Dill (4 plants)
Garlic
Kohlrabi
Leek
Onion, red, white, yellow
Parsnip
Pepper (large fruited (bell, banana, etc)
Rhubarb (stalks)
Tomato, slicing
Turnip

10 SPECIMENS

Bean, green (pods)
Bean, lima (pods)
Bean, wax (pods)
Onion, scallion
Pea (pods)
Pepper, small fruited (chili, cherry, etc)
Potato, red, white
Radishes, red, icicle
Shallot
Tomato, small fruited

*It is the superintendent's responsibility to disqualify entries for the wrong numbers of specific vegetables, *not the judges.*

Characteristics of a Good Vegetable Display

When you select vegetables for an exhibit, remember that a judge will evaluate them on the basis of quality, general condition, freedom from injury and uniformity. Characteristics that make vegetables attractive to a judge are similar to what attracts you to buy them.

Quality

It's important to know what judges look for in terms of quality in vegetables. Generally, quality is indicated by a vegetable's color, size, shape and state of development.

Many exhibitors believe that they need huge vegetables to have a winning vegetable entry. Although large size is important in a few classes – such as heaviest cabbage, largest pumpkin or biggest watermelon – large size is not emphasized as much in most vegetable classes.

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

Marketable size. Vegetables should be a size that will sell well on the open market. So when you are deciding on what vegetables to exhibit at the fair, think in terms of the sizes most consumers want at the supermarket. Consumers generally prefer average-sized vegetables over extremely large or small vegetables.

Trueness to type or shape. All vegetables should be as true as possible to the type or shape of the variety. For example, an elongated beet is not typical of the cultivars 'Detroit Dark Red' even though some elongated beets may develop from 'Detroit Dark Red' seed.

Maturity or stage of development. Vegetables should be in prime condition for eating at the time of judging. In case of a late season or early fair, immature specimens are usually accepted.

Judges should use a higher set of standards for judging green tomatoes and other immature vegetables such as winter squash if both mature and immature specimens are exhibited in the same class.

Condition

The condition of exhibits is important and includes how fresh and clean the vegetables are, and how they are trimmed.

Freshness. Many vegetables are perishable, so you should take measures to prevent shriveling. Vegetables which shrivel readily are young snap beans, beets, broccoli, carrots, celery, chard, Chinese cabbage, pickling cucumbers, endive, kohlrabi, lettuce, green onions, parsley, parsnip, radish, rhubarb and spinach.

Harvest these vegetables as close to exhibit time as possible and refrigerate them in plastic containers or other closed containers until shortly before exhibit time.

Cleanliness. Only enter vegetables that are clean and bright in appearance. Dirty vegetables give the judge a bad impression – they 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.

Trimming. Vegetables should be neatly and properly trimmed, much like market produce.

Freedom from Injury

All vegetables should be free of insects and diseases, as well as mechanical injuries.

Mechanical injuries – such as those caused by weather or rough treatment during harvest – down grade an exhibit. For example, you should not sow root crops that have been injured while digging, or squash with stems torn off.

To avoid any injury to exhibit vegetables when you're transporting them to the fair, pack the vegetables carefully in cloth or paper. Place the wrapped vegetables in bushel baskets or boxes, using a lot of crumpled paper between layers. Also take along extra vegetables for each exhibit, in case something happens to the vegetables chosen for entry in the exhibition.

Uniformity

"Uniformity" means that each vegetable on a plate or each vegetable within a display is of similar size, color, stage of maturity, shape and type. Judges place considerable importance on the uniformity of vegetables exhibits. The larger your supply of vegetables, the better chance you have to choose vegetables that are uniform in every respect.

Size. Choose the size that is desirable on the market. Remember, the biggest vegetable is usually not the best – for many vegetables, unusual size often indicates poor quality.

You should also keep the sizes of like vegetables similar. Do not place four large tomatoes and one small tomato on a plate. Instead, select five medium-sized tomatoes. Also, try to arrange the tomatoes on the plate so the largest and smallest ones are not next to each other.

Shape. Select the shape most typical of that vegetable variety.

Color. Color should be uniform for all vegetables of a variety. Intense, deep-colored specimens are usually preferred.

Maturity. Vegetables exhibited should all be at the same stage of maturity.

Type. Vegetables should all be the same variety.

Suggested Scorecard for Judging Vegetables	
	40 points
A. QUALITY	
Marketable size	10
Characteristic color	10
Typical shape	10
Stage of development or maturity	10
B. CONDITION	20 points
Cleanliness	7
Proper trimming	7
Freshness	6
C. FREEDOM FROM INJURY	20 points
Mechanical	10
Pests	10
D. UNIFORMITY	20 points
Shape	4
Size	4
Color	4
Type or variety	4
Stage or maturity	4

Suggestions for Selecting Exhibit Vegetables

The following are suggestions to help you select vegetables for an exhibit or competition. These recommendations should supplement the specific rules established by your show committee.

Asparagus

- straight, dark green spears with tight scales
- free of rust, insect injury or other blemishes
- spears trimmed to 7 or 8 inches
- clean by washing or wiping with soft cloth
- extremely perishable

Beans, Lima

In pods

- pods well-filled, bright green, tender and fresh
- trim stems to ¼ inch
- clean by wiping with soft dry cloth; do not wash

Shelled

- shell as close to exhibit time as possible
- avoid mixing young green seeds and over mature white seeds

Beans, Snap and Other (Romano, Green, French Horticultural, Wax, Yellow and Purple)

- pods tender, stringless, brittle, with seeds in immature state
- free of dirt, rust, blemishes or other imperfections
- trim stems to ¼ inch (option)
- clean by wiping with soft dry cloth; do not wash

Beet

- smooth, free of side roots and blemishes
- medium to small sized beets preferred (1½ to 2 inches in diameter for small, whole beets and 2½ to 3 inches for slicing or dicing beets))
- when cut, flesh should be firm, crisp and fine-grained
- can be displayed with top leaves (bunching beets), or cut down to ½ to 1½ inch; diagonally cut tap root ½ to 1 inch in length
- clean by soaking and washing in cold water

Broccoli

- stalk and head at least 6 inches long; firm, tender and crisp with good color
- buds tightly closed
- center head at least 4 inches in diameter or group of 4 side shoots tied neatly together
- leaves remaining to length of 1 inch above head
- clean by dipping in cold water

Brussels sprouts

- uniform, medium in size
- firm, well shaped, compact
- dark green color
- trim stem to ¼ inch
- rinse thoroughly

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
- trim all but 3 outer leaves
- clean by wiping with dry or moist cloth (if necessary), or rinse thoroughly



Carrot

- specimens straight, deep orange, color, smooth skin
- free of cracks, greening or side roots
- tops trimmed to ½ to 1 inch unless premium list specifies carrots with tops; diagonally cut tap root to ½ to 1 inch length
- length: short varieties – 2¼ to 2½ inches; half-long varieties – 5 to 7 inches; long varieties – 7½ inches or more; do not mix varieties
- clean by washing; do not scrub

Cauliflower

- heads pure white, solid, uniform, with 4 to 6 protective leaves attached
- protective leaves trimmed to 1 inch above the head to expose curd
- curd should be compact, deep, firm and at least 4 inches in diameter
- stem cut of ½ to 1 inch below bottom leaf
- clean by wiping with dry cloth or brushing if necessary

Celeriac (root celery)

- roots fully developed
- trim all branch roots
- remove top squarely to length of 1 to 2 inches
- wash thoroughly

Celery

- large plant with many crisp stalks
- trim root to 2 inches; trim stem neatly
- wash thoroughly but gently

Chard

- well developed plants or individual leaves if specified in premium list
- trim roots to 2 inches
- stalks may be red or green depending on variety
- rinse thoroughly but carefully
- perishable

Chinese Cabbage

- firm, fully developed head
- remove loose outer leaves to first tightly wrapped green leaves
- remove roots below base of leaf petioles
- clean by rinsing
- perishable

Collards

- leave 4 to 5 wrapper leaves to protect plant
- dark green color
- remove all dead or damaged leaves
- clean by rinsing
- perishable

Corn, Sweet

- ears fresh and well-filled from tips to butt ends
- kernels in milk state and arranged in closely spaced rows
- remove “flag” leaves but do not remove husks unless premium list specifies; if husking, do so carefully and remove all silk
- trim stem evenly
- clean by wiping with dry cloth
- extremely perishable if husked

Cucumber

- straight, deep green, firm with blunt ends
- trim stem to ¼ to ½ inch
- length; burpless cucumber – 10 to 12 inches; slicing cucumber – 6 to 8 inches; dill pickles – 3 to 4 inches; sweet pickles – 1½ to 2½ inches
- do not wax
- clean by wiping with a soft, dry cloth or moist cloth if necessary

Dill (seed heads or seeds; for leaves see Herbs)

- for pickling – umbels in full bloom; for cooking - seeds light brown on umbels
- large plant with symmetrical umbels

Eggplant

- specimens firm, shiny, with uniform, deep color
- small blossom scar and a fresh green calyx
- trim stem to 1 inch
- clean by wiping with soft, dry cloth or moist cloth

Endive

- specimen stout, crisp, tender
- well-blanch heart
- remove older, tougher outer leaves and roots
- clean by rinsing
- perishable

Garlic

- prepare as you would immature large onions below

Herbs

- leaves fresh and tender; free of blemishes, bruises and insect and disease damage
- trim stems evenly
- clean by washing (if necessary)
- perishable

Kale

- specimens 2 to 4 inches in diameter, tender with good color
- leave 4 to 6 crown leaves, trim all other leaves even with top of crown leaves
- cut off tap root ½ inch below the enlarged stem
- clean by brushing or wiping with dry cloth

Kohlrabi

- specimens 2 to 4 inches in diameter, tender with good color
- leave 4 to 6 crown leaves, trim all other leaves even with top of crown leaves
- cut off tap root ½ inch below the enlarged stem
- clean by brushing or wiping with dry cloth

Leek

- specimen long, thick, and firm, with pure white well balanced stems
- trim tops and roots evenly
- clean by wiping with damp cloth or rinse carefully

Lettuce (Leaf, Butterhead and Cos)

- well developed compact plants with firm, crisp, medium-sized heads
- cut stem squarely at base of head
- wash thoroughly
- perishable

Muskmelon

- evenly netted and free of decay spots, defects or cracks
- smooth stem, indicating harvest at “full-slip” stage
- clean by brushing off soil when dry

Mustard

- cut entire plant just below crown
- remove discolored or injured leaves
- wash thoroughly
- perishable

Okra

- small, straight pods that are fresh, bright green and less than 3 inches long
- harvest before pods become woody and fibrous, and seeds harden
- leave ½ inch stem
- clean by wiping with dry or moist cloth, or by brushing

Onion, Dry

- firm, mature, well-shaped bulbs, at least 2 inches in diameter
- do not peel onions. Harvest the bulbs 2 to 3 weeks before showing.
- avoid double and split bulbs, and those with soft necks
- trim top to 1 inch; trim roots at base of bulb to ¼ inch
- clean by brushing specimens while dry; do not wash

Onion, Green Bunching

- select straight plants that are 3/8 to ½ inch in diameter
- remove older outer leaves
- trim tops to 6 inches and roots ¼ to ½ inch
- clean by rinsing

Parsley

- need one bunch for an exhibit – 10 to 20 leaves
- vigorous, dark green, curling leaves
- trim stems evenly
- bunch length should be 8 to 10 inches
- wash thoroughly
- perishable

Parsnip

- roots solid, smooth, well-shaped and 2 to 2½ inches in diameter
- tapered evenly with no side roots
- skin a light, creamy yellow color
- trim tops to 1 inch; leave tap root on
- clean by soaking in water to remove dirt; do not scrub

Pea**Regular cultivars**

- well-developed green pods; leave in pod or shell as specified in premium list
- pods should have ½ inch stems (optional)
- do not wash

Edible pod cultivars

- well-developed green pods; leave in pod
- pods should have ½ inch stems
- do not wash

Chinese or snow cultivars

- pods tender, green, seeds in immature stage; leave in pod
- pods should have ½ inch stems
- do not wash
- do not mix cultivars

Pepper, bell

- firm, thick-fleshed with deep color
- all should have the same number of lobes
- trim stems to ¼ to ½ inch
- clean by wiping with soft, dry cloth

Pepper (Other than Bell)

- length, shape and color should be typical of the variety
- trim stems to ½ to ¾ inch
- clean by wiping with soft, dry cloth

Potato

- fully mature, clean, free of insect or disease damage, injury, cracks, sunburn or greening
- after tubers have dried, clean by brushing lightly to remove soil or wash carefully
- do not mix varieties

Pumpkin

- good color, thick-fleshed and heavy in weight for size of specimen
- free of blemishes and dirt
- trim stem to 2 inches
- clean by wiping and polishing with a dry cloth, or wash carefully

Radish

- smooth, firm, medium-sized
- remove tops ½ to 1 inch above crown
- trim main root to 1 inch
- wash thoroughly

Rhubard

- 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 or 2 inches; trim base evenly
- clean by wiping with dry cloth or washing if necessary
- do not mix red and green varieties

Rutabaga

- 3½ to 5 inches in diameter; smooth, free from insect damage
- remove tops ¼ to ½ inch above the crown
- trim tap root to ¼ inch
- wash carefully

Salsify

- straight, smooth, firm and at least 6 inches long and 1 to 1½ inches in diameter at top
- remove tops ½ to 1 inch above crown
- remove rootlets and side roots
- trim tap root to 1 inch
- wash carefully

Spinach

- leaves large, broad, thick and fresh
- exhibit 6 to 8 leaves or as specified in premium list
- cut squarely at base of petiole
- clean by rinsing
- perishable

Squash, Summer

- soft rind (immature) and at prime eating stage
- avoid over mature, bruised or misshapen specimens
- elongated varieties – 4 to 8 inches long; scallop varieties – 3 to 5 inches in diameter
- leave 1 inch of evenly trimmed stem attached
- clean by wiping with soft, dry cloth; do not wash

Squash, Winter

- outer rind hard and firm, full color
- avoid immature, cracked or split specimens
- leave 1 to 2 inches of stem attached
- clean by brushing or wiping with soft, dry cloth

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
- deep characteristic color, shape and size
- 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 moist cloth

Turnip

- roots at least 1½ to 2½ inches in diameter
- trim tops to 1 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 moist cloth

There are a few things that you should make sure that you *do not* do when you exhibit vegetables. Here's a checklist.

- Don't show vegetables that are injured or dirty.
- Don't show vegetables that are not uniform in size, shape, color, maturity and type.
- Do not peel onions. Harvest the bulbs 2 to 3 weeks before showing.
- Don't exhibit overripe vegetables.
- Don't exhibit more than one kind of large vegetable in a box, if possible.
- Don't exhibit leafy vegetables unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Don't use filler material.
- Don't cut windows in the husks of sweet corn.
- Do not exhibit mature summer squash.
- Don't exhibit the biggest vegetables you have, because unusual size frequently indicates poor quality due to over maturity.
- Don't include gourds, peanuts, Indian corn and ornamentals in vegetable exhibits.
- Don't exhibit specimens of "Turks Turban" – it is a gourd.
- Don't count different varieties of one vegetable as different kinds of vegetables.
- Don't forget to attractively arrange your vegetable display.



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A3306 Exhibiting and Judging Vegetables (Outagamie County version updated 4/6/17)

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