KENTUCKY 4-H HORTICULTURE AND PLANT SCIENCE PROJECT

Exhibiting and Judging Vegetables



W W September 1997

4H is a community of young people who are learning leadership citizenship and life skills.

What makes certain vegetables "better" or of higher quality than others? Do you know which vegetables to choose for exhibition? Do you know how to prepare vegetables for exhibition? This factsheet will help you as you prepare to exhibit or judge vegetables.

Vegetables will be evaluated on different criteria including condition, quality, uniformity, trueness-to-type, and size. Whether you are going to exhibit or judge vegetables, you will need to learn the characteristics of all of these criteria.

Condition

Points will be lost when disease or insect damage is evident on any part of the specimen. Produce that has been improperly washed and/or poorly prepared (trimmed) will also lose points. Certain produce will have a delicate, powdery coating called "bloom," which is considered desirable. Too much handling or washing will remove the bloom and result in a loss of points. Mechanical injury can happen at any time but generally happens in picking or transporting the produce. It is always a good idea to bring a few extra specimens that can be put out at the last minute if one of the better ones has been damaged.

Quality

It is important that the produce not be overripe or underripe. It should be at the perfect stage for eating. Also, it should not be wilted or shriveled, rough, or misshapen. The exhibit consisting of the most attractive specimen(s) will receive the highest mark.

Uniformity

If there are multiple specimens in an exhibit, they should all look the same. They should be of the same size, shape, color, quality, condition, degree of maturity, and prepared in the same manner. More first-time exhibitors lose points in this area than any other area.

Kentucky State Fair

4-H Horticulture and Plant Science Division 6015

Vegetable Classes:

575 Tomato, cherry

576 Tomato, beef steak

577 Tomato, heirloom

578 Peppers, hot

579 Peppers, bell

580 Peppers, sweet

581 Cucumbers, slicing

582 Cucumbers, pickling

583 Beans, snap or lima

584 Corn, sweet

585 Cantaloupe

586 Squash, summer

587 Eggplant

588 Potato

589 Largest Tomato

590 Largest Pumpkin

591 Largest Watermelon

Visit the 4-H Horticulture webpage at https://4-h.ca.uky.edu/content/horticulture for additional information, including exhibit factsheets for certain horticulture fair classes.

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Trueness-to-type

Each variety of a given vegetable will have certain characteristics that make it different from other varieties of the same vegetable. Some of these differences are shape, size, and color. For instance, many different shades of red and even a few shades of yellow are found in different varieties of tomato. One is not necessarily better than another if both shades are characteristic of their variety. However, a variety that may be known for later ripening will lose points under quality if it is not yet to the proper stage of ripeness. *Specimen should be chosen that are representative of their variety.*

Size

The exhibiting of vegetables is not a contest to see who has grown the biggest specimen. Likewise, the "cutest" (smallest) specimen should be left at home. Some vegetables, such as tomatoes, have varieties that are very small and are often included in a separate class.

Exhibits of vegetables that have the incorrect number of entries or the wrong type(s) of entries will be moved to last place. In order for an exhibit to receive a blue ribbon, it must score very high in all five areas, have the correct number of specimens, and be properly prepared.

Criteria for Exhibition Vegetables

For each class, a certain number of specimens of the same variety will be required. The number of specimens required will depend on the vegetable and the class requirements. Contact your county Extension agent for specific information about your county fair and the available classes and class requirements. Contact information for county Extension offices is available online at http://extension.ca.uky.edu/county.

Asparagus

Asparagus is not a common class of vegetable for fair displays because it matures so early. The asparagus must be in prime condition at the time of the fair. The proper stage of development is the "snapping" stage. The butt end may be up to 1 inch in diameter. The ideal length is between 6 and 8 inches. Specimens are to be held together by two colored rubber bands: one below the tip and the other approximately 2 inches above the butt. All spears within the bunch must be uniform in color and size and have a round stem, symmetrical shape, and tight scales at the tip. Twisted or malformed spears are not desirable.

Beans, Lima

Both large- and small-seeded lima beans may be exhibited. The pods should be well filled and contain bright green seed. Wilted or flabby beans are not acceptable. The pods should be matched for uniformity in size, shape, color, and degree of maturity. They should be laid on a plate so that varieties that curve do so the same degree and in the same direction. The stems should be of the same uniform length within a range of ¼ to ½ inch long. Specimens that are losing their green color are overmature. All pods should be free of damage from insects and diseases.

4-H Fair Project Information for Beans:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences
583 Beans, snap or lima (12 per plate)



Beans, Snap

Both green and snap beans may be exhibited. Snap beans must only slightly show the bean in the pod. They should be only $^1/_3$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ their mature size. Wilted or flabby beans are not acceptable. The pods chosen should be matched for uniformity, size, shape, color, and degree of maturity. They should be laid on a plate so that those varieties that curve do so to the same degree and in the same direction. The stems should be of a uniform length and within the range of $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch long. All pods should be free of insect damage and diseases.

4-H Fair Project Information for Beans:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences
583 Beans, snap or lima (12 per plate)

Beans, Shelled

Any variety of pea, snap, lima, or soybean may be exhibited in half-pint jars. The seed should have color and size characteristics that are true to variety. They should be free of damage from insects and diseases and be uniform in size, shape, and color. The jars should be full with no sign of moisture.

Broccoli

The minimum diameter of the head should be 3 inches. The stalk and head should be at least 6 inches long. Remove all leaves below the head by neatly cutting so no stubs are left. The flower bud cluster (head) should be compact and evenly colored with uniform buds of medium size. Do not show heads that have opening flowers, leaves in the head, or are wilted. It is wise to keep the head in water until you are ready to exhibit it. Cut the base of the stem so that it is straight and neat. The size of the head is not the most important factor to be considered. However, large heads that are tender and of equal quality will be favored over the smaller heads.

Beets

Select roots that are between 1 % and 2 % inches in diameter. The specimens should be blocky but not angular. The neck should be narrow and the

shoulders smooth. These are indications that the roots are at the prime stage of maturity. The flesh should be firm, crisp, and fine grained. Do not remove the tap root. Trim the tops evenly to 1 inch in length and remove dry stems. The specimens should be free of any soil. Damage, which results from washing or digging, will lower the quality of the produce.

Brussels Sprouts

The sprouts should be trimmed and the loosened outer leaves removed. Sprouts should be medium in size, heavy, firm, rounded, and green. Do not show tough, yellowing, or blemished produce. The neatly trimmed sprouts should be of a uniform size. One inch in diameter, after trimming, is a good size to select.

Cabbage

There are five cabbage types that may be displayed together, separately, or divided up by the superintendent of all vegetable classes after the fair starts. The types of cabbage are round, flat, pointed, red, and savoy. The stem should be cut square and about ½ inch in length. All of the leaves should be trimmed (not torn) away except for 2 layers (4 leaves) of green wrapper leaves. The head should be symmetrical and properly shaped for its variety. Select only crisp firm heads (except for the loose-headed types, such as savoy). The head should feel solid and heavy for its size but be crisp and tender. The savoy type should be of a medium size with a fine or close curl to the leaves. The pointed-head types are usually lighter in weight than the other types. This group should weigh 2 to 3 pounds with the other types weighing 3 to 5 pounds. With all other things considered equal, preference is given to the heavier heads.

A separate class may be added to cover the biggest head of cabbage. This is to be determined by the weight.

Cantaloupe (see Muskmelon)

Carrots

Carrot displays should be divided into three classes. These are long (up to 8 inches), half-long or medium (5 to 7 inches), and short (3 to 4 inches). This is determined by the variety type and not the resulting size. The roots should be washed but not scrubbed. The tap root should be left on and the tops should be trimmed back to ½ inch. The shoulders of the carrots should not be green or purple. The flesh should be a uniform deep orange, firm, and crisp. The specimens should be smooth, straight, and without side roots or root hairs. All of the specimens should be of the same size (length and diameter) and degree of maturity. Diameters will vary between different varieties. Do not bunch the roots together.

Cauliflower

The head should be smooth, clean, and firm but not fuzzy or granular. The edible portion, called the curd, should be snow white. Dirty heads indicate that the exhibitor did not protect the head from the sunlight. However, purple varieties may be exhibited in this class. The curd should be at least 4 inches in diameter. The stem should be cut square leaving ½ inch. Four to six of the leaves should be left below the head and trimmed squarely across so that they extend only 1 to 2 inches past the edge of the curd.

Celery

The entire plant will be the specimen rather than a single stalk. Trim off the roots with a square or triangular cut. Leave all of the foliage on the specimen. Splitting of stalks is common in this crop. Select a plant that does not have this fault. It is important that the stalk be at the proper stage of maturity. The uniformity and size of the outer stalks is as important as shape. Size is not the most important factor in judging, though the plant must be at the proper stage for eating and have a well-developed heart. Stalks that are twisted or malformed will result in a loss of points. This is also true for any soil that is present. Carefully rinse off any soil that has splashed up onto the plant.

Chard

An exhibit of Swiss chard is made of the entire stalk with the leaf blade attached. The stalks should be placed in a clear glass jar of water. The stalks and leaf blades should be of a uniform size, shape, and color. They should be clean and free of damage.

Corn

Generally, corn is divided into two classes: sweet corn and popcorn. The standards for these two types are the same. The judge will have the right to remove the husks. In preparing the corn, cut the stem squarely just below where the stems are attached. Do not cut too high or husks will fall off and result in an unsightly specimen.

Each ear should be completely filled. The rows of kernels should be straight except for those varieties where this is not a variety characteristic. The kernels should be of a single uniform color except for the bicolor varieties. The most important item in the judging of corn is the stage of maturity. This is where more people lose points than any other area. Select an ear of corn from the same planting date and variety. Pop a kernel with a fingernail. If the juice that comes out is watery, the ear is immature. If the juice is starchy and syrupy, the ear is too mature. When a light, milky juice squirts out of the kernel, the ear is at the proper stage for exhibiting. Do not puncture the ears that are being exhibited; this type of mechanical injury will result in a loss of points.

4-H Fair Project Information for Corn:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences
Class 584 Corn, sweet (in the husk with silks) (5 ears per plate)



Cucumbers

Cucumbers are divided into three classes depending on their size: a slicing size and two pickling sizes. Slicing cucumbers are over 6 inches long and not over 2 inches in diameter. The two pickling sizes are under 3 inches and 3 to 6 inches. Otherwise, the criteria for judging are the same.

The specimens should be dark green and nearly straight. A slicing cucumber will have an end that is blunter than that of a cucumber at the pickling stage. If a cucumber is ripe (yellow), it is too mature for use or exhibiting. The stem, which is not part of the measured length, should be left attached. It is important that the specimens be well matched and have thick, tender, and crisp flesh. The skin may be smooth or warted depending on the variety. The exhibitor may not use any type of oil or wax on the fruit.

4-H Fair Project Information for Cucumbers:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences

- Class 581 Cucumbers, slicing (5 per plate)
- Class 582 Cucumbers, pickling (5 per plate)

Eggplant

The fruit should be dark purple or appropriate for the cultivar and should not have any dark spots, which are an indication of bruising. Green and white streaking and bronzing are considered bad qualities. The eggplant should be medium in size (6 to 8 inches in length) and firm. The stem and calyx must be present with the stem cut square and an inch or two in length. Do not wash the fruit. Dirt may be removed by gently rubbing with a damp cloth. The skin may be damaged badly if the cloth picks up a piece of grit.

State Fair Project Information for Eggplant:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences

587 Eggplant (3 per plate)

Gourds

(see Summer Squash)

An exhibit of gourds may be of any single variety. If the type displayed has a color pattern, it should be clear and distinct. Specimens that do not have clear, distinct patterns are not true-to-type. Otherwise, the same basic rules for exhibiting summer squash apply to gourds.

Greens (see Chard or Spinach)

Kohlrabi

Kohlrabi is one of the vegetables where the "biggest is best" rule never applies. If this plant is grown too long, it becomes too woody. The best size is about 1½ to 2½ inches in diameter. Select specimens that are solid, crisp, and tender. The color should be uniform over the enlarged stem. Cut the stem squarely about 2 inches below the ball. Remove all but the top 4 to 6 leaves. Trim these back so that 1½ to 2 inches of the stem are left attached. Avoid washing the specimens unless absolutely necessary since this will remove the waxy layer on the surface. However, it is possible to remove dust or dirt by rinsing under a gentle spray of water.

Lettuce

The various types of lettuce may be exhibited in different classes but are generally all grouped into the same class. The heads should be medium to large for the particular type being exhibited. Choose heads that are firm, well-shaped, crisp, tender, and fresh. Cut the stem square with about ½ inch remaining. Leave most of the outer wrapper leaves attached. Remove damaged wrapper leaves after you get to the fair. This will help to protect the head while it is in transit. The head may be washed to remove soil that has splashed up onto the leaves.

Melons (see Watermelon or Muskmelon)

Muskmelon and Cantaloupe

Cantaloupes and muskmelons are generally exhibited in the same class. The melon must be mature. The best way to tell if the melon is mature is by testing the stem. If the stem slips off the fruit naturally, then generally the fruit is mature. Although the melon must be at the mature "eating stage," it must not be overmature. The presence of yellowed spots on the rind is a good indication that the fruit is "over-the-hill." This is one of the few classes of produce that is exhibited without the

stem. The stem end should be calloused and sunken. Those varieties with a netted rind must have a clear, neat pattern. The judge has the right to "plug" the melon to test the stage of ripeness. This simply means a plug or piece will be cut out of the melon by the judge so he/she can examine the flesh of the melon

4-H Fair Project Information for Cantaloupe:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences
Class 585 Cantaloupe (1 whole)

Okra

Okra should be harvested when it is 1½ to 4 inches in length. Cut the stem square so that it is ½ inch in length. Choose pods that are straight; uniform in length and width; and of the same texture, shape, and color.

Onions

Dried onions must be well cured before they are exhibited. This means digging them two or three weeks before the fair. They should be dried where there is good air circulation and no direct sunlight. The tops may be removed by twisting after they have dried. Do not peel the onion. Leave at least one clean, dry outer scale covering the bulb. You may trim the tops neatly with a pair of shears. The onion necks should be dry and clean and between 1 and 2 inches long. Trim the roots neatly to the base of the bulb, being careful not to cut the bulb. The most common faults with onions are over peeling, cracked scales, and sunburned spots.

Green onions should be at least ¼ inch and no more than 1 inch in diameter and are generally in a separate class from the dried onions. Cut the roots off close to the base and trim the tops to 4 to 6 inches. Remove the outer skin so that the white, fleshy, edible portion is exposed. Green onions should be straight, uniform, and tied with a rubber band. The most common faults associated with green onions are thrip damage to the foliage and cracking of the bulb.

Parsley

Select 10 uniform sprigs of parsley. Each sprig must be of the same length. A good length may be between 6 and 10 inches. The bunch should be green and crisp, never wilted. Sprigs with yellow or brown margins on the leaf blade should not be used. Make sure that all of the soil is off of the leaf. This may be more difficult if a curled leaf variety is being shown. Tie the base of the sprigs with a rubber band or piece of small string. Exhibit in a small glass jar so that it will stay fresh.

Parsnips

Select parsnips that are straight and have a uniform taper. The greatest diameter should be between 1½ and 2 inches with a length between 5 and 7 inches. All of the roots should be of the same light cream color. The shoulders should not be green and there should be no side roots. Do not remove the tip of the root. Trim the top square to a length of 1 inch.

Peas

Edible-pod peas should be in a separate class from the other peas; however, the judging criteria are much the same. Peas should be well matured except for the edible-pod peas, which should be about three quarters of their mature size. In either case, over-maturity will result in a loss of points. Choose pods that have a deep green color. Pick them carefully and handle as little as possible to avoid removing the waxy covering. The peas should be tender, uniform, and sweet. All other conditions being equal, preference is given to the longer pods. Leave a short portion of stem on the pod. Points will be lost for pods with broken tips. Like beans, the pods should be of the same length and width and should be typical for the variety.



Peppers

Leave the stems on the specimens but trim them almost level with the shoulders of the fruit (½ inch). In bell peppers, the pointed types should have fairly straight sides, and the blocky types should not be tapered or pointed. All of the specimens in an exhibit should have the same number of lobes. Peppers should have smooth skin that is heavy (thick) and uniform in color. Some of the more common faults found in peppers are discoloration, shriveling, immaturity, and spots on the surface of the fruit.

4-H Fair Project Information for Peppers:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences

- Class 578 Peppers, hot (5 per plate)
- Class 579 Peppers, bell (5 per plate)
- Class 580 Peppers, sweet (5 per plate)

Potatoes

Potatoes should be clean, smooth, relatively shallow-eyed, and of the same size and variety. Diseases, insect damage, cuts, bruises, and sunburn will result in the loss of points. The proper size for potatoes is between 2½ and 4 inches in length. The weight may be between 6 and 16 ounces with 9 ounces considered the most desirable. Large tubers are often rough, hollow, and generally of a lower quality. The potatoes should be dug a week or two before they are exhibited. This allows time for some drying to take place. Be sure that the potatoes are free from soil. Dirty potatoes and scrubbed potatoes will be disqualified. The proper cleaning method involves brushing them with a soft brush or cloth. Cool water may be used to soften hard soil.

4-H Fair Project Information for Potatoes:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences
Class 588 Potato (5 per plate)

Pumpkins

The size of the pumpkin will vary according to the variety. As with other vegetables, the biggest is not always the best. The field type or Jack O' Lantern pumpkins should be 8 inches or greater in diameter and should have a full, cylindrical shape. The sugar type should be less than 8 inches in diameter and

are round in shape. The pumpkin should have 2 to 4 inches of stem attached, a hard shell, and a thick layer of flesh. The color should be uniform for that variety. Fruit with a discolored "ground side" should not be entered. The specimens should be symmetrical and not excessively flattened. They should also be mature, firm, and always true-to-type. A separate class may be added to cover the largest pumpkin. This is determined by weight.

4-H Fair Project Information for Pumpkin:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences
Class 590 Largest Pumpkin (by weight)

Radishes

There are many varieties of radishes. There is as much variation in shape, size, and color as any other vegetable. All of these different types may be exhibited in the same class and judged as true-to-type. You should choose radishes of a medium size ranging from ¾ to 1¼ inch in diameter, depending on the variety. Choose radishes that are symmetrical, firm, crisp, clean, and have a smooth skin. The tops and tap root should be left on. Bunch the five roots and tie them with a rubber band or small clean piece of string. Some of the major faults with radishes are cracking, over-maturity, and lack of crispness.

Rhubarb

Stalks of rhubarb should be fresh, crisp and tender, and at the right stage for eating. They should be as uniform and straight as possible and a clean, clear red throughout for the red-stalk varieties and a solid green for the green-stalk varieties. Pull the stalks from the plant rather than cutting them. Trim the leaf blade so that 1 inch remains attached to the stalk. A good size for the stalks is 10 to 12 inches in length and 1 inch in diameter at the blade end. Keep the specimens cool so that the leaves will not wilt.

Rutabagas (see Turnips)

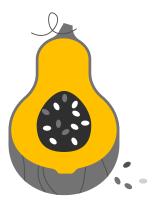
Spinach

Select a plant that is well leafed out from top to bottom. Remove the root system at the base of the plant. Since the plant will not be displayed in water, it is important that it be kept in water or moist paper towels up until the time for judging. Wilted specimens will be scored lower. Exhibit specimens that have a good green color and are at the right stage for eating. Select a plant that does not have blemished leaves and make sure that it is clean. Soil may be removed by washing with a gentle spray or submerging in cool water.

Summer Squash

All of the summer squash may be exhibited in the same class. Crookneck and straightneck squash should be between 6 and 8 inches in length and have a good lemon-yellow color. Hard or yellow-orange skin is a good indicator that the produce is overmature. The scallop types should be between 3 and 6 inches in diameter. The Italian squash (cocozelle, zucchini, and caserta) should be between 8 and 12 inches in length. All of the specimens should be well matched and be typical of the variety. Those varieties that are warted should be well and evenly warted. The stems should be left attached and trimmed to about 1 inch in length. The skin of all of the summer squash should be tender and free of all blemishes.

4-H Fair Project Information for Tomatoes:
Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences
Class 586 Squash, summer (3 per plate)



Squash, Winter

All of the winter squash may be exhibited in the same class. The rinds of all the winter squash should be very hard when fruit is mature and ready to be exhibited. Different varieties will naturally have skin that is thicker or thinner than other varieties. A good test of the maturity is when the shell is not easily punctured by a thumbnail. The Hubbards should be 10 to 18 inches in length, with 5 to 7 inches for the Table Queen or Acorn types, 10 to 12 inches for the Butternut types, and 6 to 8 inches for the Buttercup types.

About 1 inch of stem should be left attached to the fruit. The specimen should be heavy in proportion to its size and should be typical of its variety. Those varieties that are warted should be well and evenly warted. There should be a minimum of light color on the underside. The specimens should not be washed, though any dust or dirt should be brushed off with a cloth or soft brush.

Sweet Potatoes

Select sweet potatoes that are uniform in size, shape, and color and are typical of the variety. It may be necessary to dig a number of roots before you have a number of good specimens. Dig the potatoes at least a week or two early to give them some time to cure. Sweet potatoes vary in shape depending on the variety. Some are spindle-shaped, while others are globular. Either shape is acceptable. The roots should be 2 to 3 inches in diameter and a length of two to three times the diameter. Each specimen should weigh between ½ and 1 pound. They must be smooth, free from blemishes and disease, and uniform in every way. The roots must also be clean though they must not be washed. The natural bloom can be retained by brushing the dirt off.

Swiss Chard (see Chard)

Tomatoes

Tomatoes are generally the largest group of vegetables found at most fairs. It is for this reason that they are generally divided into the following classes: ripe reds, yellows, unripe (greens), plum, cherry, and pear types. If there are relatively few exhibits, the plum, cherry, and pear types may be combined in a novelty-type class. There is often another class for the largest (by weight).

The color of the tomato should be uniform over the entire fruit. Green shoulders, streaking, spotting, bruising, cracks, scars, and sun scald should not be present. The blossom end scar should be almost invisible. Ripe tomatoes should be exhibited without the stem (calyx), but green tomatoes should always have their stem. The flesh should be firm and the skin should be smooth. A separate class may be added to cover the largest tomato.

4-H Fair Project Information for Tomatoes:

Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences

- Class 575 Tomato, cherry (5 per plate) Must be ripe (red or yellow color only) type
- Class 576 Tomato, beef steak (5 per plate)
- Class 577 Tomato, heirloom (5 per plate)
- Class 589 Largest Tomato (by weight) Must be ripe (red or yellow color only)



Turnips and Rutabagas

Turnips and rutabagas are exhibited in different classes. Choose turnips that are 2½ to 3 inches in diameter and rutabagas that are 3 to 5 inches in diameter. Trim the tops back to 1 inch. Do not remove the tap root. Shape should not be blocky or angular. The neck should be narrow and the shoulders should be smooth. The skin should be clean and the flesh should be crisp, tender, and free from water core. Specimens that are very large tend to be of a much lower quality and are often fit only for stock feed.

Watermelons

A well-formed medium to large watermelon should be selected. It should be fully ripe but not overripe and should have a shape and color that is characteristic of its variety. The rind should be firm, smooth, shiny, and free of blemishes. The ground spot should be yellow; if it is white, the melon is probably not yet mature. The judge will have the right to plug the fruit to determine the stage of ripeness. Leave 1 inch of stem on the fruit. If the stem is torn off in the harvesting, it will allow the evaporation of water from the scar, thus lowering the quality. Ice-box varieties may be exhibited with the standard type varieties. However, the icebox type varieties must be true-to-type and not a small specimen of a large type melon.

4-H Fair Project Information for Watermelons:

Division 6015: 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences

Class 591 Largest Watermelon (by weight)

Visit the 4-H Horticulture webpage at https://4-h.ca.uky.edu/content/horticulture for the Kentucky State Fair guidelines and scoresheets for 4-H Horticulture and Plant Sciences exhibits.

Original prepared by W. M. Fountain, Extension Specialist in Horticulture, 1982. Revised by Ashley Osborne, Extension Specialist for 4-H Youth Development, 2021.