

## Vegetables at Fairs

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This MontGuide provides pointers on how to produce, handle and prepare vegetables for exhibition.

All vegetables need sustenance (fertilizer and secondary and trace elements), water, sunlight, air and warm weather. Also all need adequate growing space. A lack of any of these things can result in low quality vegetables. A stable moisture supply is important for quality. Poor type is often caused by uneven watering and by overcrowding. So as the first step in producing quality vegetables, you must have fairly good soil, not in the shade, with ad-

equate and frequent chances to supply water. You must take pains in spacing at seeding time or thin out the plants later. To avoid defects, you may need to control insects and diseases and "hill up" underground crops such as carrots, beets, radishes, parsnips, rutabagas and potatoes (cover roots with approximately one-half inch of soil to avoid sunburning). After producing fine vegetables, you must get them ready to show off before the judges.

Priorities in your preparations will vary. For example, little emphasis need be put on the length of stems because stem length does not add or sub-





tract from the value of a vegetable. However, careless harvesting of vegetables such as cucumbers and summer squash can remove not only the stem but take part of the flesh from the vegetable. Hence, leaving of some stem is important. Specimens must be clean to be effectively displayed. Therefore, you must place much emphasis on cleanliness.

**For all root crops:**

Cut the tops off, leaving approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch of top intact with the root. Wash roots gently but avoid injury to the skin. If storage is necessary, put them in a cool, moist place. Root crops include beets, carrots, radishes, rutabagas, turnips, parsnips, Jerusalem artichokes and horseradish.

**Cabbage:**

Trim lower leaves from heads and do not leave roots intact. Choose large, heavy or solid heads.

*Celery, celeriac, Swiss chard, endive, leaf lettuce, kohlrabi, parsley, dill and spinach:*

Remove the roots and underground portion of stem but leave the crown. Wash if needed. Keep in a moist and cool place.

**Onions (dry):**

Approximately eight days before fair, pull onions, twist tops and remove outer layer of (dirty) skin. Spread them in an open shed so air will pass over them until time to take them to the fair. Remove the tops and clip off roots, but in doing so avoid damage to the node or basal plate. Choose well formed bulbs, avoiding "doubles," thick necks or other below standard specimens.

**Onions (green):**

Dig just prior to going to the fair. Avoid damage to node or basal plate. Remove outer layer of skin to get soil off. Wash. Choose specimens that are well-blanching or white.

**Leeks:**

Treat as green onions.

**Sweet Corn:**

Remove part of husk leaving two or three layers for protection against drying. Cut off stem back to the outer layer of husk. Choose well pollinated and well developed ears with good tip cover and tip fill, in the "milk stage."

**Cucumbers:**

Harvest by cutting stems, leaving approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of stem. Avoid injury to fruit. Wash

if necessary. Choose well-shaped specimens. Those that are extremely pointed, shaped like dumbbells or badly crooked are considered off-type.

**Eggplant:**

Leave stem intact with fruit. Choose specimens with skins not dry but firm to the feel, or those which are tender and succulent. Uniformity is important too.

**Kohlrabi:**

Remove roots, but leave above-ground portion of stem. Remove leaves but avoid injury to the skin. Tenderness is important.

**Muskmelon:**

Leave about one inch of stem. Wash if necessary.

**Watermelon:**

Same as muskmelon

**Peas:**

Choose those that are sweet, moist, and tender rather than those that are bitter, dry and tough or woody. Wash if necessary.

**Peppers (Sweet):**

Choose specimens that are firm or meaty. Leave approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of stem. Keep in a cool, moist place. Avoid injury. Wash if necessary. If premium list calls for green peppers, do not include ripe or even partially ripe (reddening) specimens.

**Potatoes:**

Immediately after digging tubers, allow them to set on the ground for approximately 20 minutes to allow the skin to "set." Avoid rough handling or cuts, skinning and bruising. Wash gently. Select medium to large tubers which are smooth and free of any defect.

**Pumpkins:**

Cut stem where it naturally attaches to vine. Wash.

**Rhubarb:**

Remove all green portion of leaf. Leave base of petiole (stem) intact. Wash. Stalks must be tender and juicy.

**Summer Squash:**

Leave stem. Choose tender specimens. The long types may be from 5-8 inches long. For the round type and crooked necks, choose those which are very tender and succulent. Some types are ready for use as soon as the blossom has withered.



### **Winter Squash:**

Same as pumpkin.

### **Tomatoes (Ripe):**

Remove stems. Avoid injury. Wash. Choose those free of cracking.

### **Tomatoes (Green):**

Leave stems. Choose specimens which are not turning red.

### **Judges' Criticisms**

The following is a list of common criticisms by vegetable judges:

1. Beyond optimum use or not prime.
2. Tough vegetables due to inadequate watering and overcrowding.
3. Poor type due to uneven watering and overcrowding.
4. Dirty (uncleaned) onions.
5. Onions not dry but entered as dry onions.
6. Wrong entry. Example: White onions entered as brown onions.
7. Worm holes in leafy vegetables. These worms can be easily controlled with common garden insecticides or botanical insecticides such as rotenone, pyrethrin and others.
8. Snap bean pods not well developed.
9. Cabbage and lettuce heads not solid.
10. Green shoulders on carrots. Hill them up.
11. White rings in beets and beets beyond primeness. Plant beets at two or three intervals of time.
12. Shriveled roots caused by scraping or abrading the skin.
13. Lacking in uniformity.
14. Radishes that are pithy
15. Tomatoes with stem punctures.
16. Sweet corn not well pollinated or with missing kernels.
17. Cucumbers extremely tapered or dumb-belled.
18. Broccoli heads with open flowers.

19 Cauliflower that is not white and is "riced."

20. Black heart in celery or celeriac.

21. Potatoes with skins green in color

22. (Three) heads of dill. All of the above ground portion of the plant should be brought in and not just the heads.

23. Maggot and wireworm damage on roots, potatoes and other crops.

24. Vegetables waxed, oiled, dyed or having natural characters obscured.

### **Judging Factors**

Condition, type and uniformity are three main things judges may go by.

Condition includes primeness or the optimum stage of maturity for intended use, tenderness or toughness, size, cleanliness, freedom from damage, preparation, and absence of defects caused by insects, diseases or other factors.

Size is important to the extent that a specimen should be large enough to be useable. The largest specimens need not get first prize every time.

Type includes trueness in shape to varietal name and the degree of roughness or smoothness. Uniformity includes the factors of consistency in type, color, size and quality.

Condition and type are often directly related to the actual value (nutritional value, palatability or usability) of the vegetable. Though the factor of uniformity is demanded on the market today, it adds nothing to the actual value of the vegetable, yet we do not ignore it.

Emphasis among the factors of condition, type and uniformity will vary among vegetable species. Primeness or stage of maturity is critically important with sweet corn, asparagus, snap beans, broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers, egg plant, peas, spinach and summer squash.

Uniformity is especially important for baking potatoes, cucumbers and some others.

Type is very important for potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions and others. Therefore, point scoring will vary from one species of vegetable to the next.