



2026 Produce Specimen Standards

Characteristics of a Good Vegetable Display

When you select vegetables for an exhibit, remember that a judge will evaluate them based on 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. Specimens exhibiting the characteristics below would be considered a first-place entry.

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 the heaviest cabbage, the largest pumpkin, or the 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 cultivar '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 that 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 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.

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 vegetable exhibits. The larger your supply of vegetables, the better chance you have to choose vegetables that are uniform in every respect.

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 – downgrade 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.

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Trimming

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



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.



Stage or Maturity 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.

Avocado

- Firm, heavy for size, uniform in shape and color typical of the variety.
- Free of cracks, blemishes, or insect damage.
- Stem removed or trimmed short
- Clean by wiping with a soft, dry cloth; do not wash.
- Perishable; harvest close to exhibit time.

Beans, Lima

In Pods

- Pods well-filled, bright green, tender, and fresh.
- Trim stems to ¼ inch.
- Clean by wiping with a 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 an immature state.
- Free of dirt, rust, blemishes, or other imperfections.
- Trim stems to ¼ inch (option).
- Clean by wiping with a 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 inches; diagonally cut tap root ½ to 1 inch in length.
- Clean by soaking and washing in cold water.



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.

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 the premium list specifies; if husking, do so carefully and remove all silk.
- Trim stem evenly.
- Clean by wiping with a 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 a moist cloth if necessary.

Daikon Radish

- Smooth, firm, straight, white flesh with crisp texture.
- Free of side roots, cracks, or blemishes.
- Medium to large size typical of variety (6 to 12 inches long, 2 to 3 inches in diameter).
- Tops trimmed to ½ to 1 inch; trim root to 1 inch.
- Clean by washing thoroughly; do not scrub.



Dragon fruit

- Firm, vibrant color (pink or yellow skin, depending on variety), plump with even scales.
- Free of cracks, bruises, or mold.
- Uniform in size and shape, heavy for size.
- Stem trimmed short or removed.
- Clean by wiping with a soft, dry cloth; avoid washing to prevent moisture damage.

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 a soft, dry cloth or moist cloth.
- Clean by rinsing – perishable.

Figs

- Firm, plump, uniform in size and color typical of the variety (green, purple, or brown).
- Free of cracks, splits, or insect damage.
- Ripe but not overripe, soft spots avoided.
- Stem trimmed to ¼ inch or removed
- Clean by wiping with a soft, dry cloth; do not wash.
- Perishable; harvest close to exhibit time.

Garlic

- Firm, mature bulbs with clean, intact wrapper leaves.
- Uniform in size, shape, and color (white or pinkish, depending on variety).
- Free of damage, splits, or soft necks.
- Trim tops to 1 inch; trim roots to ¼ inch.
- Clean by brushing while dry; do not wash.

Grapes

- bunches uniform in size and color, plump, firm, compact, uniformly ripened · all grapes firmly attached to the stem, deep color for variety
- free of broken skins, insects, disease, or mechanical damage
- preserve natural bloom; rinse quickly if dusty, do not soak
- trim stems evenly

Grapefruit

- Firm, heavy for size, uniform in shape, color, and skin texture.
- Typical of variety (e.g., pink or white flesh), small stem scar.
- Free of blemishes, cracks, or damage · stems removed.
- Clean by wiping with a soft cloth.
- Display without foliage.



Guava

- Firm, uniform in size, shape, and color (green to yellow depending on variety).
- Ripe but not overripe, aromatic, heavy for size.
- Free of bruises, cracks, or insect damage.
- Stem trimmed short.
- Clean by wiping with a soft, dry cloth; avoid washing.
- Perishable.

Kumquats

- Firm, bright orange color, uniform in size and shape.
- Plump, glossy skin, typical of variety (round or pear-shaped).
- Free of blemishes or damage . stems removed.
- Clean by wiping with a soft cloth.
- Display without foliage.

Lemons

- Firm, heavy for size, bright yellow color, smooth skin.
- Uniform in shape and size, typical of variety (e.g., Eureka, Meyer).
- Free of blemishes, green tinge, or damage.
- Stems removed.
- Clean by wiping with a soft cloth.
- Display without foliage.

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.

Limes

- Firm, heavy for size, deep green color (or yellow for ripe varieties).
- Uniform in shape and size, glossy skin.
- Free of blemishes or damage.
- Stems removed.
- Clean by wiping with a soft cloth.
- Display without foliage.

Mango

- Firm, plump, uniform in size, shape, and color, typical of the variety.
- Ripe but not overripe, free of bruises or soft spots.
- Aromatic, heavy for size.
- Stem trimmed short.
- Clean by wiping with a soft, dry cloth; avoid washing.
- 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.



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.

Oranges

- Firm, heavy for size, bright color, smooth skin.
- Uniform in shape and size, typical of variety (e.g., Navel, Valencia).
- Free of blemishes or damage.
- Stems and foliage removed.
- Clean by wiping with a soft cloth.

Pepper, Bell

- Firm, thick-fleshed with deep color.
- If multiple, same number of lobes.
- Trim stems to ¼ to ½ inch.
- Clean by wiping with a 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 a 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 the size of the 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 the crown.
- Trim main root to 1 inch.
- Wash thoroughly.



Strawberry

- Firm, uniform, fully ripe, representative of cultivar in size, shape, and color.
- Free of injury, insect, or disease damage.
- Leave stems and caps attached to prevent moisture loss.
- Clean with soft brush; do not wash.
- Perishable; harvest close to exhibit time.

Squash, Summer

- Soft rind (immature) and at the prime eating stage.
- Avoid over-ripe, 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 a 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 a soft, dry cloth

Tomatillo

- Firm, uniform in size and color, husks intact and dry.
- Free of cracks, blemishes, or damage.
- Typical green or purple color depending on variety.
- Stems removed.
- Clean by wiping with a soft, dry cloth.

Tomato, Cherry

- Firm, evenly colored, mature, uniform in size and shape, true to cultivar.
- Free of cracks, blemishes, sunscald, or damage.
- Small blossom scars, heavy for size.
- Stems removed to avoid injury.
- Clean by wiping with a moist cloth.

Tomato, Heirloom

- Firm, evenly colored, mature, uniform in size and shape, true to cultivar.
- Free of cracks, green shoulders, sunscald, or damage.
- Typical color and shape for heirloom variety.
- Stems removed.
- Clean by wiping with a moist cloth.



Tomato, Hybrid

- 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 a moist cloth.

Watermelon

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