

HOW TO PREPARE VEGETABLES

This packet is intended to help you, as the exhibitor, know how to best present your vegetables. It will familiarize you with the judging criteria and allow you to understand what is expected of entries so that you can be successful. By becoming aware of the rules and expectations of the Stanislaus County Fair, you can properly prepare to exhibit your vegetables here.

Selecting Specimens

Specimens must be typical for the variety or type. Seed catalogs and type books usually give variety descriptions on shape, color, size and appearance. Choose the size that is desirable on the market. For many vegetables there is a wide range between the acceptable size limits. Unless otherwise stated, the vegetable type desired for exhibit will be uniform commercial grade rather than overgrown. Monstrosities will not be considered for cash awards.

Uniformity is essential in size, shape, maturity and color. Select specimens that are normal in growth. They should be well formed. Do not select those with blemishes or defects caused by insects, diseases, mechanical injury, or exposure to the elements. The specimens should be of top quality; they should be crisp, firm and tender.



Cleaning

Your specimens should be free of soil, dust, and spray residue. Basically, your vegetables should look like vegetables you would buy at the supermarket. Harvest and select only clean specimens if you can. This is the only way to get clean summer squash, for it is easily injured by any method of cleaning. With other crops a light brushing with a soft brush will often do the trick. This is all you should do to peas, beans, okra, cucumbers, and cantaloupes.

Fruit with a waxy surface – such as egg plant, peppers, tomatoes, or watermelons – can usually be wiped clean with a soft cloth. Root and leafy crops may often need careful washing. Otherwise, washing should be your last resort, as many varieties will mold easily. Certain leafy vegetables cannot safely be washed. Do not wash head lettuce, endive, cauliflower or cabbage. Trim off the soiled portions of these vegetables. Be sure to avoid skinning or bruising your vegetables while you clean them. All tomatoes must be displayed with no stems.

Between Picking and Exhibiting

After you have picked and prepared your vegetables, try to hold them at the temperature and humidity that will keep them in good condition. Here are some general rules for storing to help you:

- Root and leafy vegetables, sweet corn and peas should be kept at low temperatures (40-45 degrees F) and at high humidity. A home refrigerator will usually provide these conditions nicely.
- Irish and sweet potatoes, along with the “fruit-like” vegetables (like tomatoes, vine crops, eggplant, etc.) should be held at medium temperatures and at fairly high humidity.
- Garlic and onions need low humidity and good ventilation.

Number of Specimens

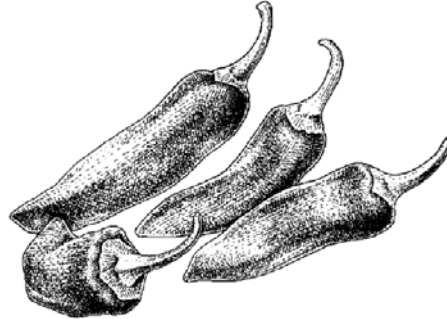
Please see pages 21-24 of your 2005 Exhibitor Handbook.

Trimming and Bunching

Neatly trim any vegetable that requires it. Trim stems to a uniform length if you do not remove them. *Please remove stems on tomatoes.* Remove old, dirty, or injured leaves from specimens to be bunched or from leafy vegetables. Cups will be provided for bunches, do not tie.

Selecting the Correct Class and Section

Be sure you enter your produce in the right section, because if you don't, your entry might be disqualified. For detailed information on this, please see pages 21-24 in your 2005 Exhibitor's Handbook.



Setting Up Your Exhibit

Transport your entries to the fair carefully. Specimens like sweet potatoes, potatoes, cucumbers, onions and summer squash should be wrapped individually to prevent bruising or scratching. It might be a good idea to bring along a few extra specimens of each variety in case something happens to one of the vegetables you chose to use. Paper boats in a variety of sizes will be provided for the display of produce. Cups will be provided for herbs. Arrange an orderly and attractive display. For example, have specimens side by side with all stems pointing in the same direction.

Labeling

Cards must be labeled with the specific variety of products and stage of ripeness must be adequately and correctly labeled. Labels must include the specific variety and stage of ripeness (for example, if entering green tomatoes, you must state "green" on your entry label).

SAMPLE ENTRY TAGS:

Entry Tag

Exhibitor:

Jack Exhibitor

001 – FFA Heirloom Variety

01 – Tomato: Ace, green

Entry Tag

Exhibitor:

Jill Exhibitor

25 – Fruit and Pod Vegetables

04 – Peppers, Hungarian Wax

Crop Notes: Special Instructions for Common Vegetables

- **Asparagus** Select straight, uniformly green spears with tight heads. Avoid spears with a purple overcast or rusty spots. Trim each spear to a uniform length of seven inches. Keep the specimens fresh by standing the spears in a jar containing an inch of cold water.
- **Beans: Lima** Pods should be fresh and green. See that they are straight and well filled with 3-4 beans. The beans should be fully sized but still show a full green color.
- **Beans: Snap** Pods should be fairly straight, evenly developed and fairly smooth. They should be crisp and tender. Over-large seeds and toughness indicate the that specimen is too old (overly mature). Pick snap beans with the stems on. Hold them in a moist place at 55-60 degrees F. Arrange the beans in a row on the plate, keeping the stems all in one direction.
- **Beets** Select smooth beets with tap roots 2-3 inches long. Good specimens are free of side roots, cracks and blemishes. Wide necks indicate old age: a desirable diameter is 1 1/3 – 2 1/4 inches. Leave 1-inch stem on the topped beets. Hold them in a cool, moist place until you exhibit them.
- **Broccoli** Heads should be compact and evenly colored with uniform buds of medium size. Stems should be solid, not hollow. Excessive leafiness in the head is undesirable. Cut the stems squarely to give an overall length of 7-inches for center heads and 5-inches for side shoots. You may trim off large lower leaves. Center heads should be 3-inches or more in diameter. Hold in a cool, moist place.
- **Brussels Sprouts** The sprouts should be uniform in size and color. They should be a medium green and they should be fresh, firm, and free of aphids. Remove any loose outer leaves. Trim the stem to 1/4 inch.
- **Cabbage** Select firm, crisp heads that are typical for the variety as to size, shape and leaf texture. Remove the other (basal) leaves except for 2-3 wrapper leaves. Cut the stem about 1/4 inch below the lowest leaf.
- **Carrots** Choose roots which are straight and deep orange. They should be free from green shoulders, coarse side roots, cracks, dark spots and nematode galls. Usual lengths are 2 1/2 to 4 1/2 inches for short varieties like French Forcing or Oxheart. They should be 5-7 inches for half-long varieties such as Chantenay or Danvers Half-Long, and 7 1/2 inches or more for the long types like Imperator. Avoid roots with very large or very small diameters. Leave a short taproot and 1-inch of stems on topped specimens.
- **Cauliflower** The head includes the white curd, the stem, and the protective leaves. The curd should be fully developed, smooth, compact, and white. Avoid heads that have curds that are over mature or show any ricing. Curds of the Snowball type should be protected from light during growth. You can do this by tying the leaves together. Remove the outer older leaves before you exhibit the cauliflower. Leave 4-6 good inside leaves to protect the head. Cut these off about 1-inch above the top of the curd and trim the stem to 1/2 inch below the bottom of the leaf. Good heads weigh 3-4 pounds.

- Cucumbers:
Slicing The market types usually have white spines and are longer and more slender when full-sized than are the pickling types. The best cucumbers are well formed, uniformly green to the tip, and fairly straight. Cut off the vine leaving ¼ inch of stem.
- Cucumbers:
Pickling: These varieties usually have black spines. The mall or sweet pickles should be under 3-1/2 inches long. Dill sizes range between 4 and 5-1/2 inches in length with a diameter of about 2 inches. Cut the stem close to the fruit (about ¼ inch long). Brush lightly if cleaning is necessary. Do not wash or wipe. The natural bloom and the spines should be left on. Display gherkins in the section on miscellaneous vine crops.
- Dill The seed heads (umbels) are cut with about 10 inches of stems.
- Eggplant Good eggplant is firm and has a small blossom scar and green calyx. It is uniformly purple and free from bronzing or greening.
- Garlic Late garlic has bulbs that are smoother and cloves that are smaller and more numerous than those of Early garlic. The cloves of Early garlic are tan, while those of the Late variety are pink or pinkish brown. Select fairly smooth bulbs with small, well-dried necks. Trim the necks to 1-inch. Roots should be trimmed close to the bulb. Wrapper leaves should be intact, clean, and white. Garlic may be stored for several months in a dry cool place.
- Lettuce: Head Heads should be full-sized and solid. They should be free of tipburn, broken ribs and seedstalks. After cutting, remove basal or outer leaves but do not remove the wrapper leaves. The loose outer wrapper leaves may be removed just before you arrange your display. It is best if you do not wash head lettuce. You may use a fine spray, however, to remove dust.
- Lettuce:
Leaf and Romaine Exhibit full sized, whole plants. Remove old, injured or dirty lower leaves. Dust or dirt on other leaves can be removed by water spray or careful washing. Remove all excess water before you exhibit the lettuce.
- Melons Honey Dews, Crenshaws and Casabas are smooth skinned melons with little or no netting. Cantaloupes have a dense netting; Persians and Pershaws have lightly netted skins. Netting should be uniform over the entire surface. Avoid immature melons or those that are overly ripe or have sunburned spots. Harvest cantaloupes at full slip. Trim stems of other melons to 1-inch. Hold melons at room temperature. See “Watermelons.”
- Onions:
Dry Good specimens are well cured. They have intact dry skins and a small well-dried neck. Medium sizes are preferred. Trim roots to ¼ inch and leave the neck ½ -1 inch long. Do not peel or wash bulbs. Best storage conditions are low humidity and temperatures. Store them either below 45 degrees F or between 80-90 degrees F. In between temperatures encourage sprouting and rotting. High humidity encourages undesirable rooting.

- Onions:
Green Good specimens have a long white stem ½ or less in diameter. The bulb should not be enlarged more than slightly. White varieties are preferred. Wash green onions thoroughly. Trim the roots to ½ inch and trim the tops to give an all-over length of about 10 inches.
- Parsley The leaves should be fresh, bright green, clean, and tender. Discard yellowed or over mature leaves. Use a water spray to remove dirt and dust. Trim stems evenly and make the bunch 8-10 inches in overall length.
- Peas Select pods that are bright green and fully filled with well-sized but tender peas. Pick and exhibit them with the stems on. Handle the pods carefully to preserve the original bloom.
- Peppers:
Bell Good specimens are well formed with 4 lobes. They should show a uniform color. Trim the stem level with the shoulders. Display specimens with the stem down. Avoid using peppers that show injury from sunburn or have a discoloration.
- Peppers:
Other Pimento peppers should have firm, thick, smooth walls and a uniform red color. Hot types should be uniform in color, whether red, yellow or green. Small hot types like Floral Gem and Red Chili are less than 4 inches in length, and long hot types such as Anaheim Chili, Mexican Chili, and Hungarian Yellow Wax are over 4 inches.
- Potatoes Medium sizes are preferred. White Rose is an example of a long white variety. Russet Burbank (Netted Gem) is a netted type. Pontiac and Triumph are red skinned, and Kennebec and Sequoia are round varieties. Harvest potatoes when they are fully mature. Dig them carefully to avoid cuts and bruises. Allow the skin to dry thoroughly before removing the soil with a soft brush. Tubers that show green (from holding in the light for a few days) or that have enlarged white lenticels (breathing pores) will make poor specimens. Wrap 2-3 times the needed number of specimens. Put each one in an individual paper wrapping and store in a cool place until exhibit time.
- Pumpkins Good pumpkins have a smooth, evenly grooved surface. They also have a uniform rich color and a hard thin rind. If the weight is light for the size of the pumpkin, the flesh is probably too thin. Large field (Jack-o-Lantern) types should be larger than 12 inches in diameter. They should weigh 10 pounds or more. You should trim the stems to 2 inches.
- Radishes The roots should be fresh, firm and uniform in shape and color. Desirable diameters are ½ to ¾ inch for the icicle type, and ¾ to 1 ¼ inches for the globe type. Remove any yellowish or injured leaves.
- Rhubarb In harvesting, pull out the stalks instead of cutting them off. Select young, tender, full-sized stalks. You may trim off most of the leaf, but leave a 1-2 inch semi-circle of leaf blades and veins attached to the stalk.
- Spinach Specimens should be deep green in color. They should be clean, tender, and fresh. Discard injured or diseased leaves.

- **Summer Squash** There are several varieties of summer squash. Each is distinct in type. Harvest summer squash at an immature stage. The rind should still be very tender. Select your specimen carefully for uniform shape and size. Trim the stem length to ¼ or ½ inch. Handle them very carefully to avoid bruising. Select clean specimens and remove flecks of soil by brushing lightly. Do not try to wash or wipe.
- **Sweet Corn** Good corn has green fresh husks and well-filled ears free of worms. You can frequently feel the presence of worms and poorly filled tips by feeling the ear. Remove any excess shank at the base of the ear. Leave some green husk leaves with short banners. Remove any dust residue by brushing and careful washing. Trim silks back to 1-inch from the tip of the husk.
- **Sweet Potatoes** Brightness, smoothness, shape and color are important characteristics to consider in selecting sweet potatoes. They should be free from sprouts, bruises, nematodes, and diseases. Most desirable potatoes weigh 8-16 ounces and are 2-3 inches in diameter. Yellow jersey is a dry type; Porto Rico and Velvet are moist varieties. Dig the potatoes a few days in advance of the show to allow some curing. Wrap selected specimens individually in paper and hold them in a warm room for 5-7 days. If further storage is needed, a temperature of 55-60 degrees F is best. A short stem and about 1-inch of taproot should be attached.
- **Swiss Chard** Select fully expanded leaves that are clean, fresh and free of injury. They should have bright and tender stems.
- **Tomatoes** Good specimens have small blossom scars and no blemishes except those characteristic of the variety. Diameters of 2 – 3 ½ inches are most desirable for many of the round varieties. Select fruits that are completely and uniformly colored, firm, sound, and free of all injuries. Stems should be removed on all except the small fruited types such as Cherry. Arrange specimens neatly on a plate with the stem end down, and stems should be removed.
- **Turnips** Specimens should be smooth, well formed and tender fleshed. They should be of medium size. Their color pattern should be typical of the variety and uniform among the specimens displayed. Trim tops to 1-inch length. Leave 2-3 inches of taproot.
- **Watermelons** Select a specimen that is typical of the type and of medium-to-large size. It should have a regular shape. Display a watermelon when it is of good eating maturity. Trim the stem to 1-inch.
- **Winter Squash** Specimens should be of regular shape and of medium size for the variety. They should be of uniform color and free of blemishes from insect damage or other injury. Small fruited varieties include the Table Queen (Acorn), Butternut, and Buttercup. The Hubbard type includes the Hubbard, Delicious, and Boston Marrow varieties.



Basic Criteria for Judging

Item	Points
Arrangement: Properly displayed, neat, correct number of specimens, labeled properly.	20
Type and Size: True to type for the variety or group. Conform to market size.	20
Uniformity: Specimens uniform in size, color, shape and maturity.	20
Condition: Well grown, good color and shape, clean, trimmed free from blemishes and rots.	20
Market Quality: Prime edible maturity (unless otherwise stated), firm, tender, crisp.	20

100 points