

the side buds. Blooms can be 'dressed' when still in growth. This can be done by carefully unfurling the petals and

- serious exhibitors often place 'pellets' between the rows of petals to ensure a circular outline, but must remember to remove the pellets before staging the blooms. The placing of pellets is unnecessary for small shows. Do not overdress blooms so that they lose their natural shape. The judges will be looking for average-sized blooms in most classes but above average size in classes for specimen blooms. Cut the stems before the show at a time appropriate to the cultivar. The cut should be at an oblique angle to the stem. Place in as deep a receptacle as possible and leave in a cool dark place.

**Other leaflets in this series:**

Booklet 1—Advice to Exhibitors, General

Booklet 3—Fruit

**Writtle Garden and Allotment Society**

[www.writtlegardeners.org](http://www.writtlegardeners.org)

See our website for details of how to join and of our shows



**Writtle Garden and Allotment Society**

**SUGGESTIONS TO EXHIBITORS OF HORTICULTURAL EXHIBITS**

**Booklet 2—Flowers**

**Taken from the RHS Horticultural Show Handbook**

## 18. The preparation and presentation of flowers.

### • Preparation before cutting

Starting 2 or 3 weeks before a show, keep the soil moist by giving generous quantities of water at each application, especially if the weather is hot and dry. In many cases the removal of unwanted weak side shoots or buds will aid development of the central or main flowers. If possible, and permissible under the schedule, protect blooms such as asters, chrysanthemums, dahlias, gladioli, lilies and pansies to prevent spotting caused by heavy rain, hail damage or splashing from the soil. If light conditions are not good, make sure pot plants have sufficient space in which to develop and turn the pots frequently to avoid lop-sided growth.

### • Cutting

Before cutting and exhibiting, carefully study the show schedule and not the requirements for each class you intend to enter. Cut for a show in the evening or early morning when the flowers and foliage are cool and not affected by heat. Flower stems should be cut as long as possible. Make a slanting cut at the end of the stalk as this will assist the uptake of water. Certain flowers, e.g. some cultivars of chrysanthemums and penstemons, are particularly reluctant to absorb water and in these cases slitting the cut stems 75mm upwards from the base and dipping the severed ends in boiling water will improve matters. Other plants, notably poppies, do not seal easily after cutting and should have their stalk ends seared in a naked flame to prevent wilting.

As cutting proceeds, avoid handling show material any more than is necessary. Carry the cut stems with blooms facing downwards, keeping the plants away from

draughts or bright sunshine as much as possible. Try to cut sufficient material to allow some latitude when final selection is made at the time the exhibit is staged.

When cutting is completed, remove undeveloped side-shoots, unopened buds and some of the lower leaves as these will often divert water from the stems and open flowers to be exhibited. The cut stems should be plunged upright up to their necks in deep containers of clean water. It is a considerable advantage to do this overnight, placing the containers in a cool position from which light is mostly excluded because stems are drawn towards the light and consequently they can become curved or bent. If this is not possible, wrap a sheet of newspaper round the material and tie at the top to exclude light. Take care to see the covering paper is tied well above the uppermost flowers and that it does not absorb any water from the container. Flowers treated in this way will be encouraged to expand before a show begins. Pot plants should receive enough water so they are fresh at the time of showing.

### • Transit to a show

Place the material, either flat or upright, in containers of sufficient size to prevent the flowers becoming squashed or damaged during the journey. Pack in cotton wool, soft paper or other similar material between specimens to prevent movement and buffeting in transport. Ensure that pot plants are securely supported to prevent excessive sway and subsequent breakage.

- **Staging exhibits at a show** Remove any damaged flowers together with discoloured or broken leaves that may have occurred as a result of the journey. Cut a portion from the base of all flower stems to assist the uptake of water, making sure that the length of stalk

retained is appropriate for the size of vase or container you propose to use. Check that all containers are filled with water or otherwise plants in your exhibit may wilt during the show. Strive to produce exhibits of good balance with flowers of even size and quality that are accommodated in containers of suitable proportions. Label exhibits clearly, preferably using block capital letters for cultivar (variety) names but defer this operation until last if it is intended to apply a final spray of water over the exhibit just before judging starts.

### • *Delphiniums*

Delphinium spikes are preferably shown with side shoots removed.

### • *Roses, cluster-flowered*

Select floriferous stems and remove the central bud of each cluster as early as possible (leaving this until the central bloom had unfurled may leave a gap in the centre of the cluster). Cut the stems before the show at a time appropriate to the cultivar. Experience will enable you to produce perfect clusters by experimenting with disbudding and time of cutting. All underdeveloped laterals should be neatly removed. The cut should be at an oblique angle to the stem. Place in as deep a receptacle as possible and leave in a cool dark place.

- *Roses, large-flowered* Select strong stems and a bud that is likely to produce a flower that is at its best on the day of the show (experience can enable this to be carried out to perfection, remembering that different cultivars and different weather conditions may affect the timing). Remove