

## How to win a blue ribbon for your produce at the fair

Displaying your produce at the fair can be fun and rewarding. The fair board encourages your efforts by awarding cash premiums along with a ribbon for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> place. At our Northwest Washington Fair, multiple entries in each class can be awarded the same ribbon, so every entry has the potential of being recognized and rewarded.

Success starts with the selection of the produce from your garden. Select your exhibit carefully, just as you would if you were sending your produce to a discerning market or for your family's table.

Each class and lot of produce will have a specified number of items that are required. For example, ten potatoes are required, six beets, five apples, or three stalks of herb dill. Any deviation from that number will probably eliminate any chance for a ribbon.

The fair premium book, which is available from the fair or the Cooperative Extension office usually in May, is an excellent guide on how to prepare your produce for exhibit. The premium book offers the standards by which your produce will be evaluated. For example, exhibitors are encouraged to leave two-inch tops on root vegetables such as beets, carrots, and onions. Exhibitors are directed to leave green stems on tomatoes and cucumbers, which will be left by using scissors or shears as you harvest the fruit. Exhibitors are encouraged to trim rhubarb leaves to two inches and leave the stalk ends untrimmed. Berries, such as strawberries, blackberries, or currants should be displayed in a full hallock, the standard container for this type of fruit.

Typically, judges for evaluation of produce at the fair use five criteria.

These are:

- Form
  - Does the display exhibit the characteristic shape of the particular produce?
- Size
  - Is the size appropriate – neither too large nor small?
- Uniformity
  - Very important when multiple items are required. Do they each look like the others in the display?
- Maturity and Condition
  - Is the entry clean, free of any pest or defect? Is it mature, allowing for the season of the produce and the time of the fair?
- Color
  - Is the color appropriate for the class and lot entered into?

In addition to these criteria, the entry must match the designation of the particular class and lot definition. If the class is apples, and the lot is common Gravenstein, then if the fruit entered is a red Gravenstein (a different lot) or a Jonagold apple, then there is little chance of a ribbon. It is up to the exhibitor to know their produce and enter it into the correct category.

### Let's look at some examples of entries of produce at the fair



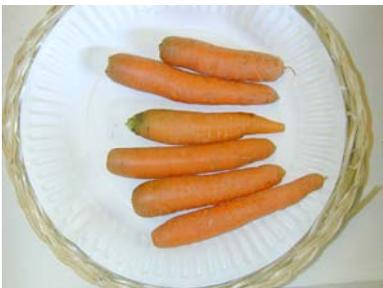
This entry of Blue Lake beans has the correct number of beans (15), their shape is typical, they are fairly uniform and are the right degree of maturity, free of pests and other defects, and have the suggested ½" stem attached.



This entry of beans is not uniform, their shape and maturity shows inconsistency, and some have their stems attached, but others do not.



These carrots, show the typical orange color, have their tops cleanly trimmed to about two inches, are fairly uniform, and are free of defects.



These carrots do not have any tops, some are light in color, and display some defects in shape (crookedness & knobiness). They are not uniform.



This rhubarb has the correct 2 inches of leaves attached. The other end of the stalk is correctly *not* trimmed as suggested by premium book. They are free from defects and relatively uniform.



This rhubarb is inappropriately trimmed at both ends. They are relatively uniform.



These peaches show appropriate form, are fairly uniform in size and shape, and are free from defects. Their immaturity and color is not an issue for the season of the fair.



These earlier maturing peaches are ripe and show good color. They are inconsistent in size and the attachment of leaves. The large peach in the middle shows a defect of a hole in the skin.

Craig MacConnell  
Horticulture Agent  
Washington State University  
Cooperative Extension  
Whatcom County  
August 16, 2000