

SHOWING TIPS FOR NOVICE EXHIBITORS

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When attending a flower show you inevitably hear visitors express the opinion that they have better specimens in their own garden. Yet few, if any, make the effort to enter a show and as novice and amateur entries dwindle the traditional flower show has an uncertain future. At the risk of stating the obvious here is a quick run through some basic steps for the novice daffodil exhibitor. You will be made very welcome at the Daffodil Society show and I suspect any Spring flower show.

BEFORE THE SHOW

- Register for a schedule. As soon as it arrives, read it carefully, making a note of classes you think you can enter. Contact the show secretary if you are unsure about anything.
- Consider offering to be a show steward or ask if you can observe. You will pick up some good tips.
- Prepare your equipment:

Vases (unless like the Daffodil Society and the RHS they are provided) Plain and stable are best but judges do not assess the vases, only the flowers.

Pre cut plain card for labels and have lip pins or paper clips carefully opened at one end to form a spike to secure the labels.

Small watering can or empty plastic bottle to top up your vases.

Cotton buds, small soft brush, large headed soft brush to remove spots, insects and smooth any creases.

Soft cloth to wipe your vase.

- Send in your entries before the deadline. Secretaries generally prefer you to include all possible entries so that they can allow adequate space and there is no penalty if you cannot enter them all.

WEEK BEFORE THE SHOW

- Check regularly on your flowers. Look for good length, strong stems and unblemished flowers or opening buds.
- Pick early. A week early is certainly not too early. Tight buds will not be ready next day but picked 7-10 days in advance they should be ready for the show. Many flowers, especially whites and pinks, need time to develop their colour fully. Place the picked blooms initially in tepid water in containers where the flowers can mature but do not

touch each other and place in a cool shed or garage. Flowers picked early are generally a better size and smoother as they have had the chance to fully absorb water.

- Discretely write the name of the flower in ball point pen towards the bottom of the stem or carefully hang a small price ticket type label around the stem. This will help you remember the correct cultivar name label for your entry. Do not remove the spathe (brown sheath from where the flower bud emerges)
- Clean off any mud splashes or fly poo with a moist cotton bud and remove any insects, webs, pollen from the cup.
- Avoid placing in sun as any orange or red colouring, however small and narrow, will frizzle and burn. Be conscious that flowers will move towards a light source. This can help if your flowers are hanging their heads.
- Pick more flowers as required, as they mature. Fully open flowers kept in a cool outdoor place can last for longer than you think - a couple of weeks is not uncommon. If flowers are a bit slow to open, bring them indoors and place in good light in a coolish room in the house.

DAY BEFORE THE SHOW

- Buy moss or gather moss from your lawn (woodland moss is a protected species), to secure your flowers in the vase.
- Check if the schedule requires flowers to be shown with leaves. Most do not as this hampers flower formation for the following year but if they do, pick carefully as required. It is permitted to select leaves from other daffodils that you have grown. Be aware that different daffodils have leaves of different colours and widths.
- Match your flowers to your entries and write a list of what flowers you are going to enter in each class.
- You may want to arrange these in vases prior to arrival at the show or leave that task until the day of the show.
- Select clean unblemished flowers, ideally with good poise and at a 90 degree angle to the stem.
- Choose smooth untwisted, undamaged petals, fully open with a good overlap at the base. With your thumb and forefinger grip the base of the petal and gently but firmly press to fully open any hooded flowers. (try practicing on a bunch of shop bought daffodils - you will be surprised at the difference it makes)
- The ideal flower will have symmetry and balance and be the correct condition, colour and size for the cultivar.

There should be no gaps between petals - check the back of your flower to see if it looks as good as the front

Look for rounded trumpets or cups - a gentle pinch between thumb and forefinger can help to make them rounder.

They should have a clear colour without streaks (often a sign of virus) and a strong unblemished stem proportionate to the size of the flower

- It is not permitted to trim petals or use artificial aids eg to lengthen the stem.
- Three blooms are conventionally arranged in a triangle with one bloom at the top and the remaining two neatly either side, not touching and levelled up to form a pleasing set. All stems should be straight and not angled..
- Secure your chosen flowers by packing the vase with moss so that they face forward and help the judge see their merit.
- Do not anticipate the outcome - you may think that your flowers are not 100% but remember other exhibitors will think the same. A judge often has to make decisions about flowers that have less faults and difficult weather conditions can affect everyone's flowers. A worthy winner needs plenty of competition and show visitors need to see well filled show benches so take your entries along..

DAY OF THE SHOW

- Carefully transport your flowers to the show securing any filled vases and ensuring flowers are not rubbing against each other.
- Get to the venue in good time so that you get a staging space - they are always scarce.
- Walk around the show hall with your schedule to make sure you know the layout. Anything you are not sure about ask a show steward or the secretary in a quiet moment.
- Check your entries against the schedule for a final time. If a flower looks past its best be very careful if you substitute another flower. Many an experienced exhibitor has chosen an inappropriate replacement and received the dreaded comment N.A.S. - Not As Schedule.
- Another quick check for insects, pollen, marks etc and ensure the vase has adequate water and is labelled. Make sure your moss is neat and tidy. Wipe over the vase and place in the correct class with your entry card displaying your exhibitors number.
- Enjoy a bit of banter with fellow competitors. Tidy up your staging area and leave promptly when asked to do so.
- Return to the show and enjoy any success. Make a note of any flowers that you like that have done well. Think about ways that you could improve your entries.
- Congratulate and chat to other exhibitors they will probably be happy to give information about their suppliers and share some showing tips especially if they know that you are a new exhibitor..

AFTER THE SHOW

- Visit (and enter?) other shows if you can. See the show calendar on the Daffodil Society website.
- Look at catalogues for next year. General bulb catalogues have catalogues available by May and smaller exhibition daffodil suppliers as early as February.
- Order early to avoid disappointment - no later than June. Offer to accept substitutes from specialist suppliers but state what you are seeking . eg Division 2 only or Mid season pinks etc
- Ensure your bulbs are lightly fed, adequately watered and looked after until the leaves die down. Mark the spot to ensure they remain undamaged by subsequent planting. Look out for the pesky narcissus fly in May.

Happy exhibiting!