

Selecting and Judging Vegetables

Delaware Cooperative Extension

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Every year FFA and 4-H Members enter local and State Fairs to compete in the vegetable judging categories. FFA Members learn to apply best management practices available to efficiently produce and market vegetables in their Agriscience classes during the school year.

As a 4-H member, when you enroll in your community club, you are encouraged to choose project areas that interest you. By doing the activities listed in the project books and taking advantage of contests the County and State 4-H offices hold, you will gain valuable experiences, learn life skills that will help you in school and your community, and master the project area. One project area, Gardening (includes four books: Seed and Sprout, Let's Get Growing, Take Your Pick and Growing Profits) is a great opportunity to learn how to grow plants, establish a vegetable garden, harvest fresh ripened fruit and enter these at the State Fair. At the State Fair you have a chance to win premiums and ribbons, such as a

blue ribbon for first place. Always read the fair entry book to know the specific rules and submission dates. The following is a quick reference for Delaware State Fair 4-H and FFA entries: Rules, Selecting and Preparing Vegetables, Transporting and Handling Vegetables, Display Tips, Reasons for Disqualification and Educational Resources.

Rules:

Every County and State vegetable event has rules. Some rules include the time deadlines to have your vegetables at the event for judging, entry class numbers on tags correct, Student Identification correct, special instructions (containers, tops removed, peeled, etc.), the number of vegetables in the display for each entry (see the chart below for Delaware State Fair vegetable entry requirements) and when your entries must be removed following the event.

Vegetable	Number needed for entry	Number needed for entry	Vegetable	Number needed for entry	Number needed for entry
	FFA	4-H		FFA	4-H
Beets w/out tops	4	4	Potatoes All varieties including Red	4	4
Cabbage	1	1	Pumpkin	0	1
Cabbage – Largest head by weight	0	1	Pumpkin – Largest by weight	0	1
Round radishes w/ tops	5	0	Eggplant	1	1
Carrots w/ tops	5	4	Sweet Corn ears in husks- Yellow	3	*See below
Sweet Corn ears in husks- White	3	* See below	Sweet Corn ears in husks- Bi-colored	3	*See below

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	<u>FFA</u>	<u>4-H</u>		<u>FFA</u>	<u>4-H</u>
Cantaloupe	1	1	Squash – Summer Yellow crooked neck	3	**See below
White Squash	2	0	Squash – Summer Yellow straight neck	3	**See below
Cucumbers – Slicing long green	3	3	Squash – Zucchini	3	3
Beans - Lima in pods Bush or Pole	12	12	Tomatoes – red slicing type w/out stems	4	4
Beans – Snap Green in pods	12	***See below	Tomatoes – green slicing w/ stems	4	4
Beans –Wax Yellow in pods	12	***See below	Tomatoes – Red Cherry w/out stems	12	****See below
Onions – unpeeled and w/out tops Yellow	4	*****See below	Tomatoes – Red Sauce/Italian w/o stem	6	****See below
Onions – unpeeled and w/out tops White	4	*****See below	Tomatoes – Red grape w/out stems	12	0
Peppers Cherry w/stems	6	0	Tomatoes – green Cherry or Italian	5	4
Peppers - Bell w/stems	4	3	Tomato – Largest ripe	0	1
Peppers – Hot Other than cherry or banana	6	3	Peppers Banana w/stems	6	0
Watermelon – large type 2” stem	1	1	Watermelon ice box or midget, 2” stem	1	1
Home pickling cucumbers	5	0	Vegetable Garden Display	<u>FFA</u> No less than 6 vegetables to be exhibited in a moveable container	
Market pickling cucumbers	10	0		<u>4-H</u> – No less than 5 vegetables to be exhibited in a moveable container	

*Sweet Corn 4-H has only one class - 3 ears white, yellow or bi-color

** Summer squash 4-H has only one class - 3 summer squash either straightneck or crookneck

*** Beans Yellow Wax or Green Snap 4-H has only one class - 12 yellow wax or green snap beans

****Tomatoes Cherry or Italian 4-H has only one class - 4 cherry or Italian green or red tomatoes

***** Onions w/out tops, unpeeled 4-H has only one class - 4 onions, w/out tops, unpeeled any color

Selecting Vegetables to Exhibit

In Delaware, our State Fair is held at the end of July. This is a great time for gardeners because most vegetables growing in our gardens are ripening and reaching maturity. The ideal time to visit your garden to select your fair entries is late afternoon or early evening the night before you will be entering them to be judged. When selecting, make sure the item is true to variety characteristics and is not over mature. An example of true to variety is Crookneck Summer Yellow Squash where all three items should have the typical curved neck. Choose an item that is just slightly immature that will be allowed to reach maturity in a day or two (when it is judged). Remember biggest is not always best. Make your selection as if you would be buying these items in the grocery store; look for high quality. In addition, items should not be shriveled, wilted or damaged by the harvester or tools, insects or diseases. They should be as perfect and identical as possible. If there are multiple items needed for the entry, they should all be as close as possible to the same size and weight. Don't put four large tomatoes with one small tomato for an entry plate of five medium tomatoes. If you aren't sure, look in a vegetable seed supply catalog for photos and specific information on vegetables to guide you. To ensure you have enough good vegetables for your entries, remember to pick a few extra items in each category just in case some are injured on the way to the event. Produce not used in the exhibit can be donated to a food bank, which provides us an opportunity to help others.

After they are harvested, keep items in a cooler or refrigerator overnight. Be sure

to line containers with crumbled newspapers, straw, shipping peanuts or other padding material to reduce bruising or scarring. Leafy entries such as lettuce, Swiss chard, kale, or herbs should be placed in clean, cool water as soon as they are cut. This will help keep them fresh and crisp. If they are wilted the next day, cut the ends and put back in fresh water.

Preparing Vegetables

Dirty vegetables give the judge a bad impression. Let them know you are serious about the competition by making sure your vegetables are clean, free of debris, soil and damage. Use a soft damp cloth and wipe dry before submitting your entries. If the class requires vegetables to be trimmed – i.e. beets without tops – it should be done neatly and properly. Use sharp tools with care.

Transporting and Handling Vegetables

This is the important part of entering vegetables. Even if you select the highest quality produce, if bruising or other damage occurs during transport, your time and effort in the beginning will not matter during judging. Line your transporting container with crumbled newspapers, straw, shipping peanuts, or other padding material. Tender-skinned vegetables such as: eggplant, ripened tomatoes, summer squash, zucchini squash, etc. should be individually wrapped using newspapers or tissue paper. Keep your entries out of direct sun, as this will cause discoloration and will cause greening on potatoes. They should be transported as quickly as possible and not kept in a closed, hot vehicle for any length of time.

Display Tips

Entries should always be shown at their best. They should be groomed, but not look unnatural. Remember vegetables will be inspected on all sides by the judges during the competition.

Reasons for Disqualification

Several conditions that may disqualify your entries may include the following:

- ◆ Improper preparations of the entries (i.e. sweet corn ears that have been husked, beets with tops left on or onions that have been peeled).
- ◆ The incorrect number in an entry (i.e. 13 snap beans in a class requiring 12 or 3 cherry tomatoes in a class that requires 5).
- ◆ A mixture of different varieties in a single class (i.e. a mix of Italian and Slicing Tomatoes in a slicing class or a mix of Crookneck and Straightneck Squash in the Summer Yellow Squash class).

Win or lose; we should all learn from the experience, and accept the challenge to improve future displays and exhibits.

Following the fair remember to donate any good, useable produce to the Food Bank.

Educational Resources

The University of Illinois Cooperative Extension has several great videos on YOU Tube, entitled "Preparing Vegetables of Exhibition" the address is <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLB8C938A57E5AE39F>

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