

Advice: Vegetable and Floral Sections, Summer 2026

Your entries don't need to be perfect. Don't be afraid, just 'have a go'!
The more entries the better the show.

- The purpose of these tips is to help those exhibitors who want to know more and not to discourage entries.
- Exhibitors should check that their entries comply with all the requirements mentioned in the Schedule.
- Please contact the Show Secretary for further advice on specific classes. breamgardeningsociety@gmail.com
- The name(s) of the cultivar(s) exhibited may be displayed on your exhibitor card, for the benefit of the visitors.
- The following resources provide some excellent information to help you grow and prepare your horticultural exhibits for showing. Whilst this advice is generally applicable, the requirements listed in the **Bream Summer Show Schedule 2026** should always take precedence.

Books:

'The Horticultural Show Handbook' published by the RHS. This guide will be followed by Roy Haviland when judging the Vegetable and Floral Sections. This guide is regularly updated but older editions still provide valid guidance.

'Getting Started on the Show Bench - A beginners guide to growing and showing vegetables' by Derek Brooks and published by the National Vegetable Society. Although our judges follow the RHS guidance when judging, this NVS book provides some great practical advice for those showing vegetables at any show.

'The Great British Village Show', published by Dorling Kindersley. A good beginners' guide with advice for all show sections.

Websites:

<https://www.teabreakgardener.co.uk/show-time-a-beginners-guide-to-showing-fruit-veg-and-flowers/>

<https://www.allotment-garden.org/vegetable-show/>

<https://medwynsofanglesey.co.uk/category/articles/>

https://www.frittendengardeningsociety.co.uk/frittenden_garden_society/file/PDF/Tips_for_Showing.pdf

Class-specific Advice: Vegetable Section

The judge's preferences have been given for guidance only.

All qualifying produce is most welcome - please don't be discouraged.

- Ideally, exhibits should be fresh, clean, blemish-free and with no sign of pest or disease damage.
- In general, fruit and vegetables should be exhibited with no additional garnish.
- Where more than one of a kind is specified, the produce shown should be as near identical in size, shape and colour as possible.
- **Vegetables and fruit in collections** should be grouped but not cramped so that each kind can be seen. These classes may include vegetables and/ or fruit which appear elsewhere in the schedule or not. For advice on any produce which is not individually listed in the schedule, please contact the Show Secretary.
- When cleaning **potatoes** and **root vegetables**, all traces of earth should be removed but take care not to damage the skin.
- **Potatoes** tubers of approximately 200-250g are preferred. Tubers should not be misshapen. Eyes should be few and shallow. There should be no green colouration as a result of exposure to light.

White potatoes should show no colour at all. **Coloured potatoes** may be uniformly coloured or just show colour around the eyes.

When cleaning potatoes, all traces of earth should be removed but take care not to damage the skin.

Arrange the potatoes on a plain plate with the eyes (rose end) facing out. You may cover your exhibit with tissue paper to exclude light prior to judging.

- **Carrots** should be pulled from the soil carefully to maintain an intact tap root. **Long carrots** should have a taproot that gradually tapers over its full length. **Stump-rooted carrots** with a good blunt end to the root, rather than a taper, are preferred. Ideally, there should be no green colouration around the shoulders of the carrots as a result of exposure to light.

When cleaning carrots, pay particular attention to cleaning the crown and foliage. Clean around the roots, never rub up and down. Small side roots should be removed. Leaf stalks should be trimmed to 7.5cm.

Arrange carrots side by side in a triangular formation with the roots pointing towards the front of the bench.

- **Beetroot** should be pulled from the soil carefully to maintain an intact tap root. A single small taproot is preferred. Skin should be smooth with no leather effect. Exhibits which are too old and woody will be marked down.

Small side roots should be removed. Leaf stalks should be trimmed to 7.5cm.

Display your beetroot on a plain plate.

- **Onions** at least 7.5cm in diameter are preferred. Onions should be well ripened but firm. Skin should be dry, unbroken, unblemished and ripe - smooth but not excessively 'skinned' and green. Avoid onions with thick, immature necks.

Roots should be neatly trimmed to the basal plate. Tops should be tied with raffia if possible. Trim off the surplus neck foliage to leave approximately 1cm above the tie. Advice on how to tie onion tops is available here [Dressing Shallots & Onions for Exhibition + Plaiting/Braiding Some Shallots - YouTube](#) . Raffia is available from the Show Secretary.

The onions should be staged on rings so that they sit upright on the show bench. Rings may be simply cut from a cardboard tube. Rings are available if requested in advance of the show.

- **Shallots** should be prepared for exhibition in much the same way as onions. However, they should be presented in a shallow dish of clean, dry sand or similar.
- **Green salad or spring onions** should be fresh with tender leaves and swollen bases with clean roots attached. Bases should be white unless a red cultivar is being shown.
- **Runner beans** should be cut from the vine with a short length of stalk attached. Ideally, bean pods should be straight and of uniform width without a skinny neck. They should have a good even colour. They should not be limp, coarse or stringy, and the seeds should not be overly prominent in the pod.

Arrange your beans in a straight line one alongside the other, all the beans facing the same direction and with all of the stalks at the top.

- **French beans** should be cut from the vine with a short length of stalk attached. Ideally, bean pods should be straight and have a good even colour. They should not be limp or stringy, and the seeds should not be overly prominent in the pod.

Arrange your beans in a straight line one alongside the other, all the beans facing the same direction and with all of the stalks at the top.

- **Pea pods** should be cut from the vine with a short length of stalk attached. Pods should be fresh, full of fruit and snap easily if tested. Not over-ripe. The pods should have an even colour and a good bloom - avoid finger marks if possible.

Arrange your pea pods in a straight line one alongside the other, all the pods facing the same direction and with all of the stalks at the top.

- **Brassicas** may have outside leaves removed but not too many. Cauliflower leaves should be neatly trimmed to expose the curd. Stems of cabbages and cauliflowers should be trimmed to approximately 7.5cm. Kale is best presented in a vase of water to maintain freshness.
- **Marrows** should display good colour all over. Choose tender, young fruits - under 35cm in length is preferred. (If a round cultivar is shown, approximately 15cm in diameter is preferred.)

Marrows should be exhibited with at least 2cm of stalk attached.

Courgettes should display good colour all over. Choose tender, young fruits - under 20cm in length are preferred. (If a round cultivar is shown, approximately 7.5cm in diameter is preferred.) Avoid washing to maintain the natural bloom.

Courgettes should be exhibited with about 2cm of stalk attached. They may be displayed with or without flowers attached.

- **Cucumbers** may be a greenhouse or outdoor (ridge) variety. They should be straight and not over mature. They should display good colour all over with no marks where the fruit has been rubbing against the plant. Avoid washing to maintain the natural bloom.

Cucumbers should be exhibited with about 2cm of stalk attached. They may be displayed with or without the dead flower attached.

- **Peppers** and **chillies** should be fully formed but may be immature. (Mature specimens will be preferred.) They should not be misshapen and should be uniform in colour - either green or in their coloured stage. They should not be limp and should look freshly picked.

Peppers and chillies should be exhibited with their stalks attached. May be exhibited on a plain plate if preferred.

- **Tomatoes** should be regular in shape and size and colour. They should be firm but fully ripe. To maintain their natural bloom, they should not be polished.

Tomatoes should be exhibited with a fresh green calyx attached. They should be staged on a plain plate with the calyx facing up.

- **Tomato trusses** should be cut as close to the mainstem as possible. Single or double trusses are acceptable. Ideally there should be no missing or split fruit. Trusses with 1/3 ripe, 1/3 nearly ripe, and 1/3 underripe fruit are preferred. with the fruit ripening in order down the truss.

- **Lettuces** are best displayed with their roots intact. Wrap washed roots in moist tissue and enclose them in a small plastic bag, neatly fastened. Remove outer damaged leaves but do not over trim. Avoid lettuces that show signs of bolting.

Exhibit with the heart of the lettuce facing the front of the bench.

- **Soft fruits** should be regular in shape and size. The fruit should be ripe with good colour but not overripe. Skins should be intact and there should be no sign of bruising. Strawberries should not be 'hard-nosed'.

Handle fruit as little as possible and do not wash or polish the fruit so that the natural bloom is preserved.

Soft fruits should be exhibited with stalks or calyces attached where possible. Grapes should be picked as a complete bunch with a piece of lateral shoot on either side of the stalk to form a T-handle. Display your fruit on a plain plate or shallow dish.

- **Stone fruit** should be regular in shape and size. The fruit should be ripe with good colour but not overripe. Skins should be intact and there should be no sign of bruising.

Handle fruit as little as possible and do not wash or polish the fruit so that the natural bloom is preserved.

Stone fruits are best exhibited in a line.

- **Rhubarb** sticks should be fresh, tender, straight, long and with a well developed colour. Pull, don't cut, the stems from the clump. Wings at the base of the stick should be retained but may be trimmed slightly to tidy. Leaf blades should be trimmed to 7.5cm.

- **Fruit or vegetable not in schedule:** contact the show secretary for advice and for the number of specimens required.

Handle fruit as little as possible and do not wash or polish the fruit so that the natural bloom is preserved.

- **Compost** should be fairly dry, well rubbed and separated.

Class-specific Advice: Floral Section

The judge's preferences have been given for guidance only.

All qualifying produce is most welcome - please don't be discouraged.

- **General hints:** Desirable merits and defects vary considerably between varieties and types; however, some general hints are - freshness, cleanliness and condition, form and uniformity, trueness of colour, size of blooms in balance with stems, stems clean and free from defects. Look for flowers and foliage that are free from disease, insect damage and blemishes. They should be at the optimum point in their life cycle, fully developed but not yet fading.

Any **ornamental bracts** will be considered as part of the flower. The plant will be considered to be in bloom if its bracts are fully expanded, even if the true flowers aren't completely open.

The use of **foliage**, of the same kind as the flowers shown, is optional in all cut flower classes.

- **Cutting flowers:** Ideally, flowers should be cut in the evening, making a slanting cut to assist the uptake of water. Stems should be cut as long as possible. Remove unwanted side shoots, buds and lower leaves. Plunge into a deep container of clean water and store in a cool dark room until required. When preparing your exhibit, remove any damaged, discoloured, or broken leaves and trim the stem. Make sure the stem retained is appropriate for the size of the flowers.
- **Arranging blooms:** Unless otherwise stated, flowers should be displayed in a vase of water. Where possible, choose vases to suit the height of the stems. Unless an 'all-round exhibit' is specified, arrange blooms so that each flower is facing the front and is well spaced. Packing materials may be used to hold the stems in place in the vase; however, in line with RHS guidelines, floral foam (Oasis) is not permitted. Packing materials must not be visible in the finished exhibit. Flowers should not be wired.
- **Rose** stems should be an original new growth and should not have been 'stopped'. They should be straight and with any lateral growth removed. Disbudding and deadheading is permitted.

Rose petals should be smooth, firm and unblemished.

Large-flowered specimen roses should have outer petals which regularly surround a well-formed conical centre. They should be shown in a vase with a small neck. (Vases are available if requested in advance.) This class will be the first class judged.

Cluster-flowered roses may be floribunda, grandiflora or polyanthana. Stems must have two or more blooms. Blooms should not be cramped together, to allow space for the flowers to fully develop, but without a wide gap between the blooms.

Vase of 3 large-flowered roses should contain 3 blooms of the same cultivar: 1 in the bud stage, 1 in the perfect stage, and 1 in the full bloom stage.

Blooms in the '**bud stage**' should show full colour with one or two petals beginning to unfurl above an opening calyx.

Blooms in the '**perfect stage**' should be half to three quarters open with petals symmetrically arranged within a circular outline; stamens, if exposed, should be fresh and of good colour.

Blooms in the '**full bloom stage**' should be fully open with the petals symmetrically arranged within a circular outline; the stamens, if exposed, should be fresh and of good colour.

- **Sweet peas** should have as many blooms on each stem as possible. Choose strong, straight stems with well-spaced blooms. Blooms should be fully open with erect standards, rigid wings and keel closed. Petals should have a silken sheen.

For further information visit [Staging a vase - National Sweet Pea Society](#); however, please note that the use of floral foam is not permitted in the Floral Section at Bream Summer Show.

- **Marigolds** should be *Calendula officinalis* (pot marigolds) [Calendula officinalis|common marigold/RHS Gardening](#),

NOT *Tagetes patula* (French marigolds) [Tagetes patula|French marigold/RHS Gardening](#) and

NOT *Tagetes erecta* (African marigolds) [Tagetes erecta|African marigold/RHS Gardening](#).

- **Dahlia flowers** should be in full bloom, not young or old. All florets should be intact, firm and without blemishes. Stems should be strong, straight and in proportion with the blooms. Preferably, some dahlia foliage should be retained on the stem.

Dahlia types: Single-flowered, anemone, collarette, waterlily, decorative, ball, pompom, cactus, semi-cactus, miscellaneous, fimbriated, star, double orchid, paeony or stellar. [Classification - National Dahlia Society \(dahlia-nds.co.uk\)](http://Classification-NationalDahliaSociety.dahlia-nds.co.uk)

For more advice on exhibiting dahlias visit [IDEALS.pdf \(hayling island horticultural society.org.uk\)](http://IDEALS.pdf(haylingislandhorticulturalsociety.org.uk)), [FAULTS.pdf \(haylingislandhorticulturalsociety.org.uk\)](http://FAULTS.pdf(haylingislandhorticulturalsociety.org.uk)) and [Exhibiting \(dahliaworld.co.uk\)](http://Exhibiting(dahliaworld.co.uk)).

- **Gladiolus** spikes should not be bent, twisted or drooping. They should carry fresh, unblemished florets and foliage with no empty bracts. Removal of florets is discouraged but one or two may be removed to improve the balance of the spike.

Non-primulinus types should have a long, well-balanced spike which gradually narrows from base to top. Numerous regularly spaced florets should hide the stem; ideally, $\frac{1}{3}$ in full bloom, $\frac{1}{3}$ coloured buds, and $\frac{1}{3}$ green buds.

Primulinus types should have a slender stem that carries 14 to 20 regularly spaced florets in a stepladder arrangement. Florets should not be too tightly spaced so as to hide the stem. Florets should all be in full bloom or in bud.

- **Sunflowers** may be any variety in full bloom - a single bloom or a multi-flowered stem. The stem should be strong and straight.
- **Pinks and carnations** should have guard-petals that are flat, firm and well formed. The calyx should not be split. Stems should be rigid and strong, and proportionate in length and thickness to the size of the flowers. Flowers should have a symmetrical circular outline. Flower colour(s) should be clear, bright and well defined. Flowers should have a strong scent.

Pinks should have flowers that appear light and dainty. Petals may have edges that are smooth or evenly serrated. Singles should have 5 evenly shaped flat or wavy petals that overlap. Doubles should have petals that evenly diminish in size towards the centre. Flowers should face straight upwards or at only a slight angle. The stems should carry subsidiary blooms or buds.

Carnations should have full flowers with no gap or hole in the centre. **Border carnations** should have petals with smooth edges (slight indentation is permitted) and the centre petals may stand up slightly to form a crown. **Perpetual-flowering carnations** should have large flowers and the edges of the petals may be smooth or evenly serrated.

Sweet Williams should have stiff erect stems which bear many-flowered terminal heads. The heads should be dense and often appear flattened. Singles should have 5 serrated petals. Flower colour(s) should be clear, bright and well defined. Flowers should have a strong scent.

- **Stocks:** common stocks (*Matthiola incana* aka Brompton stock, hoary stock, ten-week stock, or gilly-flower) night-scented and evening-scented stocks (*Matthiola longipetala*) were not excluded in the schedule so will qualify.

Common stocks should have clusters of blooms forming a frilly spire on a sturdy erect stem. The flowers may be densely packed or loosely spaced depending upon the cultivar. The flowers should have a clove-like scent.

- **Orchids:** A high proportion of flowers on each spike should be in full bloom. Spikes shouldn't be too kinked or disbudded. Any pseudobulbs should be of good quality.
- **Flower not in schedule:** contact the Show Secretary for plant-specific advice.
- **Mixed vase of cut flowers** must be arranged for 'all-round effect'. A good proportion of the flowers should be in full bloom. If a single kind of flowers is shown, a minimum of three different cultivars is required. If foliage is included, it should be of the same kind as the flowers shown.
- **Vase of foliage** must be arranged for 'all-round effect'. May include any non-flowering plant material, including fruits and seed heads. If a single kind is shown, at least three different cultivars are required.
- **Pot plants** are generally displayed for 'all-round effect', and so should be turned every few days in the lead up to the show. However, some pot plants (e.g. orchids) are naturally front-facing, and so won't be downmarked when exhibited in this way. Some pot plants (e.g. Tradescantia) may be composed of more than one plant in the same pot to generate a balanced display.

Plants should be commensurate with the size of their pot. Ensure that the pot is clean and undamaged; although the pot itself will not be judged. Naturally epiphytic plants may be shown attached to a piece of wood or bark instead of in a pot.

Foliage and flowers should be clean and healthy. Carefully remove any damaged or faded flowers or foliage from your plant. Remove any debris from the top of the compost.

If staking or wiring is required, it should be discrete and not detract from the appearance of the plant.

For plant-specific advice please contact the Show Secretary. The skill required to grow certain pot plants will be taken into consideration by the judge.

Flowering pot plants should be in full bloom and/ or in bud with most flowers open. Plants should be well balanced with flowers proportionate in size and number to the size of the plant. Decorative bracts are considered to be an integral part of the flower and are judged as such.

Foliage pot plants should be sturdy and shapely. They may be in flower but will be judged on their foliage alone.

- **Begonia: flowering tuberous** plants include, for example, the '**Nonstop**' series of prolific double-flowered begonias and the **Bolivian begonia hybrids** which have a trailing habit and narrow elongated petals (tepals). No fibrous-rooted bedding or cane-like begonias (wax, angel wing or dragon wing begonias) or foliage begonias (rhizomatous begonias e.g. Rex begonias).

The plants should be well balanced but need not be shown for 'all-round effect'. Flower size and number should be proportionate to the size of the plant and will depend upon the cultivar. Single or double flowers. Double flowers should have a circular outline with broad overlapping petals which culminate in a single centre. Stems should be stout and erect unless a trailing cultivar is shown.

Support for the blooms is permitted but must be tidy.

- **Pelargonium (also known as geranium)** plants can be of any type: zonal, ivy-leaved, fancy-leaved, regal, scented-leaved, angel, decorative, stellar or unique. [Pelargonium Types Explained | BBC Gardeners World Magazine](#)

For specific advice on showing pelargoniums visit [Pelargoniums – The Pelargonium and Geranium Society \(thepags.org\)](#) and [Shows – The Pelargonium and Geranium Society \(thepags.org\)](#)

- **Collection of herb plants:** May be culinary or medicinal herbs.
- **Blooms on a board:** 4 blooms displayed on a black board. Each bloom should be of a different kind (e.g. 1 fuschia, 1 pansy, 1 begonia and 1 orchid bloom) or, if a single kind is shown, of a different cultivar (e.g. blooms from 4 different fuschia cultivars).

The stems of the flowers may be in water behind the board. Blooms should be clean, healthy and undamaged.

How to make a simple display board:

Start by punching or drilling 4 or more holes in a piece of wood or thick cardboard. Paint your board black or cover in a black fabric. If you want to keep the stems of your blooms in water, mount your board on top of a shallow waterproof container as shown below. Thread the stems of your blooms through the holes in the board and into the water below. (Alternative methods for keeping the stems of your blooms damp are allowed.)



Photographs from [A Show of Fuchsias : Grows on You](#)

Note: the water tubs shown could be much shallower and painted black for neatness. In this case, 6 different cultivars have been shown; however the BGS Summer Schedule 2026 requires only 4 blooms.

- **Floating flower heads** may be displayed in any bowl up to 30cm in diameter. One or more kinds of flowers may be displayed. The arrangement should be well balanced and fill the bowl but the flowers should not be overcrowded. All of the flowerheads should be floating freely.



Photographs taken by Helen Esplin at Malvern Show 2023 and from [A Show of Fuchsias : Grows on You](#)

- **Collection of culinary herbs** should contain foliage from 4 distinct kinds of culinary herbs - variety is favoured. Your herbs should be displayed in water in a labelled jar. Common names are sufficient. Specimens should be fresh and young. Herbs should be picked in prime condition for culinary use.
- **Collection of medicinal herbs** should contain foliage from 4 distinct kinds of medicinal herbs - variety is favoured. Your herbs should be displayed in water in a jar labelled with their common names and uses. Specimens should be fresh and young.

Contact the Show Secretary if you are unsure if your herbs are classified as medicinal.

- **Collection of edible flowers** should contain flowering stems from at least 3 distinct kinds of edible flowers - variety is favoured. The flowers should be displayed in water in a labelled jar. Common names are sufficient. Specimens should be fresh and young and in prime condition for culinary use. You may include 'weeds' as well as cultivated flowers.