

## **EXHIBITING TIPS: Conditioning, Grooming and Showing Specimens**

- **Read the Schedule (Exhibitor's Guide).** Check for correct class and subclass. *Note size limitations.*
- **Proper identification of genus and species, and common name is required.** Do research ahead of time to avoid last minute confusion and stress. If appropriate give variety and cultivar. Reference and nomenclature help is available at the Show, but consultation may slow the progress of your entry.

### **Cutting and Conditioning**

1. **Cut the specimen properly.** Cutting in the early morning or late afternoon is best. Use a sharp knife, cut at a slant, and put immediately in a bucket of water that you have carried to the garden. Very warm water (100 to 110 degrees) and a depth of 1/3 the length of the stems is best.
2. **Select healthy specimens with graceful form.** On a flowering branch, it is desirable to have some blossoms fully opened but others still in bud. Never have blossoms that are "over the hill." Leaves must be strong, have good color and be free of damage.
3. **Cut several specimens of each variety.** Take all the stems to the Show so the best ones can be selected for entry.
4. **Condition the specimen properly.** Conditioning tips for particular plants can be found in reference books, but here are some general categories:

**Bleeders (exudes milky substance):** Seal by searing cut ends in flame 30 seconds and put in cool water. Hellebores are included in this category.

**Woody:** Slit or hammer up to 1" before placing in warm water. This category includes: flowering quince, winter honeysuckle, winter jasmine, flowering almond, forsythia, rosemary, pussy willow, spirea, thunbergia, oriental magnolia, winter sweet and mahonia bealei.

**Hollow:** Re-cut under water to prevent air bubbles that stop absorption. Place in warm water (90 degrees or warm bath temperature) and then cool. Generally, warm water is absorbed more quickly than cold. Narcissus and Amaryllis are in this category.

**Camellias:** Cut Camellias (best with two perfect leaves facing up so you don't see the underside when looking at the bloom). Use a flower tube for transport on cotton batting in an enclosed plastic container. Keep cool. For ease of transportation if flower tubes are not available stick the stem in a grape.

## Grooming

- **Grooming is essential.** Tables are provided at the show for last minute grooming. It is recommended that the bulk of the grooming is done before you bring the plant to the show.
1. **Examine specimen very carefully.** Remove spent blossoms, damaged leaves, any foreign material, (dirt and debris) and dead stems. (Do not remove the calyx-papery wrap- from narcissus bloom)
  2. **Foliage.** Wash foliage with water (1/3 vinegar to 2/3 water) if leaves are smooth. Brush with soft brush (paint brush) if leaves are hairy. *No oiling or spraying of leaves allowed.* Trimming of leaves should be unobtrusive and following the natural lines of the leaf. Any fresh cuts can be camouflaged by touching the new cut with a brown or black magic marker.
  3. **Top Dressing.** The choice of top dressing should be appropriate to the plant. For example, moss or small bark for ferns and bulbs, pebbles for sun loving plants such as cacti. Keep the soil slightly below the level of pot so that the top dressing does not wash out when watered.
  4. **Pots.** Pots should be clean of all dirt, free of cracks and salt deposits. The inside rim should also be cleaned. Standard clay pots are preferred. They should be the correct size and appropriate to the proportion of the plant. Fiber pots and ridged containers (including black or green nursery “production” pots) are not acceptable. Dirt in the pots should be level.

**After grooming is complete, put the plant on the floor look at it from above to assure the plant is in outstanding show condition.**

## Transporting and Staging Cut Specimens

1. **Transporting your specimens to the Show.** Soft drink cans placed in cartons can be used to help separate specimens and reduce spillage. It is also desirable to use a plastic crate with crushed newspaper between specimens to keep them from falling.
2. **Wedging Material.** Wedging material and containers for cut specimens will be provided by the Show. Use the wedging material to assure that the branch and blossom will be at the proper angle and can be seen to its best advantage by the judges. The judges should not have to bend over to see the blossoms at their best.
3. **Camellia Cups.** Special cups will be provided by the Show for camellia entries.