

Workshop - Improving Participation in Shows

Introduction

At our Federation Day on February 24th 2018, approximately 40 members participated in this workshop, creating a large number of ideas. The results are listed below, grouped into different categories for ease of use.

Thanks are due to those who contributed.

If your society is concerned about show participation, browse the list & feel free to use & adapt any of the ideas provided here:

1. Advertise/promote the club & its shows:

- Create & use an organisational Facebook page or website & add a link to that site from other online sites
- Give new residents a 'welcome' pack listing the various local community organisations
- Publicise the club's activities via an entry in the parish magazine or similar
- Start advertising the show several months before the show date, so that competitors have plenty of time to plan their entries – sow seeds/ take photographs
- Encourage local businesses & individuals to sponsor the show (for as little as £10 each) – they will be more inclined to advertise at their premises & it helps cover show costs
- Word of mouth – actively spread the word to friends & neighbours
- Emphasise to doubters that it is simply a village show

2. Make it easier/less challenging to participate:

- Open classes to non-members
- Include classes that may be prepared in advance to reduce last minute stress
 - cookery examples – jams, chutneys, liqueurs
 - fruit & vegetable examples - onions, garlic, potatoes
- Include classes that are quick & easy to make/stage 'on the day'
 - cookery example – scones
 - fruit & vegetable examples - apples, cherry tomatoes, peppers
- Broaden classes to include hanging baskets &/or other containers – may be brought in, or judged in situ, with photographs displayed at the show
- Extend classes away from strict horticulture, e.g. photographs, craft, eggs
- Reduce the number of items in a class, e.g. 2 onions, 2 potatoes
- Mix things up – e.g. a class comprising 1 flower & 1 vegetable
- Exhibit but without judging/ competition – no winners or losers
- Garden competition to focus on a nominated area, e.g. rockery, specific border, rather than the entire garden
- Stress that floral arrangements may use plant material from other people's gardens

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3. Provide show material:

- Offer plug plants or bulbs to all members , to be judged at the show
- Provide new members with a 'starter pack' e.g.
3 seed potatoes, 10 runner bean seeds, 10 French bean seeds, beetroot seeds, 10 onion sets & ask them to enter 3 of each in 5 single item classes & 1 collection

4. Encourage younger/ more active people:

- Broaden the scope of the society – if it's mainly 'retired' gardeners, create a more 'active' spin-off club, e.g. veg growers club or children's section, providing advice & help to get growing & then encourage them to show
- Create classes especially for children, e.g. plants in a pot /welly/boot etc, to contradict the notion that shows are only for older people
- Children's classes to take account of age/be judged within age groups
- Allow children to enter classes for free
- Meet local playgroup/pre-school organisers to encourage their children to participate/make it a playgroup /pre-school activity
- Go into the local primary school to encourage entries – in person/in school
- Advertise children's classes in local primary school parents' newsletter
- Contact other local organisations to encourage them to enter e.g. scouts, guides, church groups, allotment holders, after school clubs
- Supply entry materials to a local school/scout/guides group, e.g. bulbs in pots

5. Encourage group entries:

- Allow family entries – adults + children
- Allow collective entries – up to 3 people?

6. Demystify the show:

- Hold pre-show workshops
- Invite a show judge to a normal members meeting to demo 'how to', e.g. staging daffodils approximately 2 weeks before the relevant show
- Judges to note comments on all entries, offering advice for next time & increasing confidence
- Produce a helpful hints sheet for exhibitors – selecting advice from the RHS Show handbook
- Simplify the terms used in schedules – remove or explain technical language like 'strig', 'niche', 'bikini vase', 'staging', etc

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7. Encourage new participants:

- Create specific classes for novices
- Committee members (especially Show Sec?!) to encourage, mentor, then challenge selected club members (take a lead from the “cunning Show Sec”)
- Appoint experienced exhibitors to mentor novices on a 1-2-1 basis
- Have small-scale practical meetings, e.g. planting-up hanging baskets &/or other containers
- Encourage new participants to enter ‘just 1 class’ to make a small start
- Interest friends by telling them how easy it is to enter your local show – maybe even point out a particularly good item (plant/fruit/bloom/vegetable) in that person’s garden

8. Reduce entry fees to encourage toe-dipping:

- Reduce entry fees (to 10p/class?)
- Have free classes
- Limit entry fees e.g. 50p/class up to a maximum of £5, additional entries free

9. Attract visitors to the show– as a way of tempting future members &/or exhibitors:

- Offer homemade teas & cakes
- Promote widely as a community rather than a members only event

End