

Staging Plants for Competitive Shows

CCCSS's world-class succulent experts have shared what they think is important when preparing plants for competitive shows. Following are excerpts from previous presentations:

The purpose of entering is to share information and to enjoy yourself while doing this, but you have to enter in order to get the enjoyment. Pick your favorite plant; keep it simple; clean it up (no bugs, dead matter or debris); clean and shine up the pot. *The biggest mistake you can make? Don't enter.*

In previous years, several of our experts have given advice for staging plants on staging plants for competitive shows:

- Their No. 1 advice for winning is selecting show plants that are well grown.
- **You must have had the entered plant for at least six months** with an exception for plants acquired at the December holiday party.
- The same plant can be entered year after year.
- Our experts recommend that any repotting for the show be done a month or so before the show to stabilize them.
 - **Nick Wilkinson** recommends that you start with the plant and then select a pot that compliments it in some way, such as mimicking some feature or color. He suggests that the plant not be placed too deeply into the pot and says that he likes to see the plant somewhat mounded above the rim. Top dressing makes a nice finishing touch.
 - With the exception of dish gardens, there should be only *one plant per pot*.
 - *Succulent Container Gardens* by Debra Lee Baldwin was recommended as a good resource. It is in our library, but is usually checked out. It is available for sale on Amazon.com.
- Judges reputedly look for a clean, well-grown plant without elongated growth due to changing light or fertilizer conditions ... the focus is on condition and maturity. Remember that the judges also grow succulents and are familiar with them and how they are supposed to look. Staging is not as important, although it could be the tipping point in otherwise equal specimens.
 - Consistent, uniform growth is valued, versus visible changes based on light conditions.
 - Secondary considerations are presentation and maturity
- The experts said that about *15 percent of judging is based on presentation* (pot and dressing). Decorative pots and top dressing can add to the presentation, *but cutesy gewgaws are discouraged* – judges want to concentrate on the plant without distraction.
 - Pots should be presentable; Mineral oil or WD40 can be applied to plastic and clay pots (both types of pots are appropriate) to hide the white crud, the worst of which can be ground off with a pumice eraser or sandpaper.
 - Acidified water in a spray bottle may remove hardwater spots (1 Tablespoon vinegar per gallon of water).
- Plants should be *dry* (not recently watered), free of insects and cleaned of debris. Diluted vinegar in a spray bottle is good for removing water spots. Small brushes are helpful in removing dead leaves and spider webs.
- **Gene Schroeder** recommends taking a small tool kit to the show with you to fix up any mishaps. His kit includes top dressing, cleaning materials: tweezers, toothbrush, skewers; spoon for top dressing; knife; clippers; spray bottle with vinegar solution for removing spots.