

## TIPS ON TAKING PHOTOS FOR JUDGING.

These tips are for photographing horticulture and design for judging. These are not for garden photography as specimens will be in containers or pots, or for vegetables or evergreen branches they will be lying directly on a flat surface or on a table.

### Horticulture

- After taking several photos, I personally feel that the judging will be difficult if judging just the entire specimen. In other words, to fit the entire specimen in the photo one would have to be back quite far. I think that it would be best if two photos per specimen could be entered; one with the entire specimen and another with a closeup of the flower or leaves so the judges can tell maturity, blemishes etc. The same for container plants, one with the total plant and another with a closeup of the foliage/flowers. Or they could be sent over the telephone so that a judge could enlarge the photo to see it close up.
- I would suggest using a very neutral background such as white, off-white, beige/tan, or a very pale blue or pink. I tried a black background for horticulture and think it just doesn't work for photography. There is nothing wrong with using a white wall and regular tabletop either if the specimen can be viewed clearly. Don't kill yourself with scotching down to get a shot, although using a chair is smart way to go. You can use a box or stack books so that the specimen is at an easy height for shooting, just make sure that they are covered or cropped out of the picture.
- For horticulture what you don't want is for the color of the background to interfere with the colors in the specimen and I would suggest that you keep to white/off white. For an all green specimen black can work.
- The judges will need to see the stem and hopefully enough of the leaves to make a judgment call. As you know clear glass is typically used, but since this is for photography, I would suggest that you might use a pin holder or kenzan to hold your specimen. Too often, even with wedging, the specimens can lean. When physically present the judge can bend over or lift the specimen with a pen. But in a photograph, this would be difficult. A kenzan would allow the exhibitor to place the specimen so that it would stand up straight and face the camera, and since the specimen no longer needs to sit for hours waiting to be judged it makes sense that once the photograph is taken you are free to use the specimen or dispose of it.
- For vegetables you will want to make sure that you can see all the specimens on the plate. Standing directly over the exhibit is probably not going to give the judges the best view. Holding the camera at an angle will allow the judges to see all specimens from the front.
- African violets or other plants that require the radial placement of inflorescence and leaves should be shot from above. This would definitely give the judges a full view of any gaps and also the ability to see the condition of the leaves.
- Larger container grown plants will probably be best photographed from the front and just slightly above the container. Again, if by a window you will need to brighten any shaded side.

- Branches that must be laid on a table or floor should, of course be photographed directly above them. If hanging, stand directly in front or to the side to avoid any shadows. Background as stated before should be neutral.
- Lighting horticulture is tricky. If you have space by a window, placing the specimen so that it faces the window will work well. Just make sure your shadow, as you take the photograph, doesn't interfere. If you can only place the specimen so that it is beside the window, one side will be lit and the other will most likely be shaded. That may be dramatic looking, but not good for the judges. I would suggest finding a secondary source of soft light to put on the opposite side, or you can use a reflector. You can use the back of a large sheet pan if it is shiny enough, a disposable foil pie plate, a piece of cardboard covered with aluminum foil or anything that will reflect the light. Then hold or prop up the reflector so that it brightens the shaded side of the specimen.



Side lighting



With reflector



Reflector set up

- To use a flash or not that is the question. Sometimes the lighting is perfect, and you don't need much extra lighting. Overhead lighting can be harsh on designs and hort specimens. Below are three examples of different lighting techniques. One with no extra lighting, just the window; one with a flash and one using HDR or high dynamic range. Notice that the first specimen almost looks like it is in silhouette. Front lighting is needed, yet when I used the flash feature on the phone the shadows created almost interfere with the specimen also. I think it would be hard on a judge to try to decipher shadow from specimen. The third example is done using the phone's HDR feature. The camera takes the guesswork out and calibrates what it thinks is the best lighting. You can always use editing features to brighten or darken the photo.

- The fourth picture is a closeup of the specimen. As I mentioned before, I think having two photos of a specimen is better. One for pose and foliage placement and a closeup to actually view the inflorescence.



Unlit



Flash



HDR



Close up

- Try to remember that for a photo, the placement of the fruit or vegetables will be important. The first photo crowds the specimens and they are not well lit. Again, it would be hard for the judges as the lighting changes the colors and one seems smaller. The second photo, with the pears well-spaced shows them off to better advantage and their colors look more similar.



Bad placement overhead lighting



Better placement with flash



☛ Good for judging pose

Good for judging condition ☛





## Design

- Lighting for design is sometimes a little more difficult than that for horticulture because you are not dealing with a single specimen and a small reflector may not be sufficient. I found that a dark background tends to hide any shadows that are likely to appear from overhead or side lighting. Side lighting, however, tends to add some depth to the design to avoid that flat look. But, it would most likely need to be soft and on both sides.



Overhead light creates distracting shadows



Using a flash blows out whites and also creates shadows on the edges

## Compare to the black background



Unlit



Flash – still some blow out



HDR

- When using branches in design it is especially important to avoid the harsh shadows caused by using a flash as it will make it difficult for the judges to decipher the branches from the shadows. It seems to create a doubling effect.



Flash



HDR

I hope this information is helpful. My cell phone is used mainly for quick picks and usually have a hard time holding it still. Because of that I regularly use a tripod when using my camera. As you know, a sharp photograph, especially when it is being used for judging is important. Don't be afraid to take as many photos as you need to get a sharp one since there is no cost involved for taking them, unlike in the good old film days.

- Try holding your elbows close to your body to help keep the phone or camera steady.
- Try propping up your elbows onto something else, if possible, to help keep the phone or camera steady too.
- Remember that when you use the flash on the phone, at least on mine, there will be a quick flash used for red-eye reduction followed by the camera flash and then you will hear the click. So don't move the camera until after you hear that click or you will have a blurry photo.
- The HDR feature also takes a second or two, so don't be in a rush to move the phone.
- Don't forget that you can, and should, use the edit features in the phone especially to crop and straighten. All the photos presented above were cropped on the phone. You can also lighten or darken an image. The Apple store has classes for learning how to use the photo features on their newest phones which have tons of features.