

What Judges look for on a Show Bench

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The following notes are written mainly for novices and beginners who might be entering plants in a show for the first time.

Cymbidium – Standard

Flowers, leaves and pot should be clean. If the pot is old and in poor condition, place the old pot in a new pot. Some plants do not naturally have all flowers facing the same way on the raceme but this is taken into account as the important feature is to have all flowers visible. Do not exhibit a plant with dead or dying flowers.

Leaves should not show signs of manipulation in order to have all flowers visible. Any bad ends on the leaves should be trimmed but this must be done as neatly as possible. They should be trimmed at an angle similar to the natural leaf shape.

The plant should have a minimum of seven flowers but if the plant had only five or six good flowers (without any being removed) it can be exhibited. Beginners are usually given some latitude but ensure you learn from this. Flowers should be circular in outline and this is best explained by stating “a circle can be drawn around any flower regardless of shape but the flower segments should fill most of that circle”. This means broad segments without them being turned backwards or twisted. A flower is not a flower until it is fully open and will be judged with this in mind. Some standards are best exhibited in an upright fashion but others look best either arching or pendulous. Look at your plant after it has been staked and compare it with others on the bench and make the decision as to how best your plant looks.

All plants can be staked and tied with minimum tying but ensure the stake is not protruding beyond the tip of the raceme. Minimise as much as possible the diameter of the stake (no telegraph poles please). Judges can untie any or all ties to check if the raceme supports itself. If a flower has been broken from a raceme during transport it can be placed on top of the pot with a “Damaged in Transit” note. Do not attempt to cover the broken section with a tie. This is unacceptable conduct and will most likely be noticed.

Intermediate - Miniature Cymbidiums

All of the above applies except the flower count. These plants will naturally carry more flowers per raceme than standards. This group is judged mainly as a pot plant and the number of racemes in proportion to the size of the plant is a feature. This means a plant in a 300 mm pot must carry more racemes than a similar plant in a 175 mm pot. Flowers should be clear of the leaves.

Native Orchids

Ensure plants and pots are clean. Racemes on hybrids can be staked but racemes of species cannot be staked. However, the pseudo bulb can be staked and tied to maintain flower visibility. Beginners should be aware that the dockrillia type of native/hybrid exhibits their flowers in an upside down manner (resupinate). Flower numbers are important as some plants do not carry large numbers of flowers per raceme, so it is important to have open as many flowers as possible, commensurate with the size of the plant. Flowers should be visible without the need to lift the pot and tilt it backwards to see them properly.

Paphiopedilum - Complex & Novelty Hybrids

Most paphs in the winter show will carry a single flower per stem. This should be staked in an upright fashion as this genus does not have pendulous racemes. The tie must be below the ovary. This is the bulky and sometimes hairy section at the top of the stem, immediately below the flower. Do not attempt to have the stem looking like an “S” bend. If this occurs the judge will know you have neglected to stake at the correct time. A good stem is approximately 200 mm but the important feature is to have the flower clear of the leaves. Remember, some species and hybrids have very short stems. Ensure the plant looks slightly concave in profile with the ventral sepal overlapping the dorsal sepal. Petals should ideally be wide with rounded ends. This is a feature of good paphiopedilums. Irrespective of whether the plant is a complex hybrid or novelty type the same staking standards apply. Novelty paph flower shape is different and is judged accordingly.

Laeliinae Alliance

Exhibition cattleyas will be judged similar to standard cymbidiums. Full-shaped circular flowers are expected. Petals should not fall forward or be bent back (reflexed). A circular labellum is a feature on all good cattleyas. Flowers should not overlap each other. The plant should be slightly concave in profile. The smaller flowers in this group should be smaller versions of the exhibition type. Cluster cattleyas which carry many flowers will not usually achieve this shape and are judged with this in mind. Try to tie the main stem on each raceme and not each individual flower. This generally applies to exhibition cattleya's with more than one flower.

Oncidiinae Alliance

This is the group which frequently has branched racemes. These are either staked in an upright or arched style. All flowers must be visible and with oncidium and odontoglossum types the flowers should be flat in profile. Ensure the odontoglossum type has approximately seven flowers but oncidium's (varicosum type) will normally require 12 flowers. Other types will be judged according to their parentage.

The prime aspect of flower assessment is shape, followed by colour, flower size, substance and texture and floriferousness.

Substance is the actual strength of the flower segments.

Texture is the quality of the surface of the flower which makes it attractive.

Floriferousness is the total number of flowers on a raceme or plant.

Vertical and or horizontal symmetry is important in judging, depending on the genus being judged.