

Flower Show Judging

Every year many visitors to the flower show ask how it is judged. Here is an explanation of how the flower show is judged, and by whom.

In theory we could ask anyone to judge the flower show. However, in fairness to our exhibitors we choose people with a lot of knowledge and experience, who will fully appreciate the hard work and skill that exhibitors use to build their exhibits. The trade stands can take a one or two days to build, and the landscape gardens up to seven days. It is not uncommon for exhibitors to work all night before judging the following morning.

There are 2 basic groups of judges we can call upon. These are The Royal Horticultural Society Judges (RHS) and The Guild of Horticultural Trade Display Judges (GHTDJ)

The RHS judging system is quite complex and requires a great deal of training. It is used at all the large RHS shows such as Chelsea, Hampton Court, Tatton Park etc. The judging is done by a committee using a points system which extremely complex. The object is to be as accurate as possible and to give fairness to the exhibitors.

However, most of the county shows and independent shows use the GHTDJ judges. Each year we invite two judges. By using two judges, we hope to get a balanced opinion and the right results. To be a member of the GHTDJ, judges must have specialist knowledge of plants and exhibiting. Many judges are very experienced exhibitors or retired exhibitors; and there are also many retired parks department managers with experience of showing and a few show organisers.

They follow certain guidelines in judging, and each exhibit is judged against a standard, not against each other. Providing they follow the guidelines they should arrive at the correct result.

There is one big difference in results between the RHS and GHJDJ. The RHS have only 3 medal cards; Gold, Silver and Bronze. With the GHTDJ there are 5 medal cards; Large Gold, Gold, Silver Gilt, and Silver and Bronze. We believe the GHTDJ approach makes it a little easier to judge, and perhaps fairer to the exhibitor.

To achieve Gold with the RHS the exhibit must be as near to perfection as possible. The same applies to our large gold medal. However, with the RHS system, a minor fault will reduce the award to a Silver medal, whereas a GHTDJ judge can reduce it to a Gold or Silver Gilt.

As the flower show at the New Forest Show is sufficiently large enough, we can divide our exhibitors into five classes. These are: Pot Plants; Herbaceous Plants; Trees and Shrubs; Cut Flower; and Landscape. A trophy is awarded to the winner of each class. Once all the medal cards have been awarded, the judges look for the Large Gold winners of each class and award the trophy to the Best in Class. From those class winners, they then choose the Best in Show and Reserve Best in Show.

To make matters even more complex we have one further award. Our show is affiliated to the RHS and is of high enough stature that the RHS allow us to present the Banksian Medal for best exhibit in show. The Banksian is named after Sir Joseph Banks, first director of Kew Gardens, as mentioned in A Brief History of Flower Shows. Its presentation has its own peculiar set of rules and generally it is awarded to our Best in Show, but not always. Because of its rarity it is highly prized by our exhibitors as there are only a few shows where it is awarded.

Once all the awards are given out then it is the job of the Chairman of the flower show to calculate and award prize money to the exhibitors. We have a fixed sum of money which is divided up using a simple points system according to medal cards. This money is provided by the New Forest Agricultural Society until we can find another sponsor.