

Awarding the American Orchid Society Show Trophy

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No one should attempt to judge a group of plants or cut flowers arranged for effect in competition for the American Orchid Society Show Trophy without first having had experience in setting up such displays and actually participating in the competition for the award. Experience of this nature will aid in a useful understanding of those characteristics that make an effective exhibit. This knowledge will aid in the judgment of what to look for in a superior and, therefore, awardable display.

All too often, the concept is that the show trophy is there for all AOS-sanctioned shows and, therefore, it should be awarded. Occasionally, the trophy is awarded to the best display in the show, even though in reality the display may not merit such recognition if Section 6.3.3 of the eighth edition of the AOS *Handbook on Judging and Exhibition* is to be followed. The principles outlined in this section of the handbook, when properly applied and the point scale followed accordingly, not only will make the superior exhibit readily apparent but, in cases such as described above, will make the withholding of the trophy equally apparent and justifiable.

The weakness of an initial appreciation score is that it easily could fall into the category of the best display in the show but not necessarily within the provisions of the score of 80 points as required in Section 7.4.1 (5) of the handbook. Occasionally, someone will imply that the exhibit with a first-class ribbon awarded for the best in its class and the most blue ribbons for best individual plants or cut flowers is the one that should receive the show trophy. Without attempting to justify or criticize the merits of such an argument, what would happen if show trophy judging took place before ribbon judging? Would a consensus be achieved? To speculate might question the ability and, to a lesser extent, the integrity of those who must make the judgment, including the decision on how to vote. But when adequately applied, the principles and point scale outlined for judging all displays arranged for effect can readily reveal the superior exhibit and the score it should receive whether or not any other judging takes place. Taking the time and making the effort to score the best exhibits properly and thoroughly are the key ingredients of success in this respect.

In applying the scores outlined in the point scale for judging such displays, whether the judge takes off points for a lack of specific items within the individual categories or adds points for those items that are meritorious depends on the individual judge's point of view. Theoretically, the end result should come out the same. But a positive attitude means the latter and a positive attitude is an essential part of objective judging.

General Arrangement (Design), 35 points — The point scale to be used for judging exhibits for the AOS Show Trophy outlines 35 points for general arrangement, with balance, dominance, proportion, rhythm, scale and contrast listed as individual ingredients of this component of the total score. No breakdown or individual score is assigned to any of these principles of design.

Recently, while judging at the Southern Ontario Orchid Show in Toronto, Canada, Margaret Brown, an accredited judge from the Great Lakes Region, suggested that each of these individual principles should be considered, with each assigned a theoretical value of six points. This would make a total of 36 points for general arrangement, as opposed to the total of 35 points presently allotted for this category. However, if each of these six aspects is considered independently for a maximum score of six points each, the merits adding up to the total points would be better understood and the final score for general arrangements could be determined more readily. Of course, a thorough understanding of the six principles would be a prerequisite.

In the *Awards Quarterly* of December 1987 (Vol. 18, No. 4), Margaret Brown also discusses the scoring for orchid flower arrangements and corsages in a similar manner. She expounds an almost identical scoring suggestion for the principles of design in these arrangements, with individual scores limited to five points in a total score of 30 points. In both cases, the principles are the same. The only variation or difference is the number of points attributable to each principle based on the total score for what is being judged.

Quality of Flowers, 35 Points — Quality of flowers in an exhibit does not necessarily mean the number of flowers awarded blue ribbons out of the total number of flowers in the exhibit. It is conceivable that in a show of excellent quality, first-, second- and third-place ribbons could and would be awarded to flowers of superior quality, all exhibited in the same display, with only minor differences among the three flowers. In ribbon judging, only the very best of all flowers placed in competition with one another in the same class will receive a blue ribbon. (Judges do have the discretion of subdividing a class but this happens infrequently.)

This does not necessarily mean that all other entries, including second- and third-place winners lacked quality. Nor does it mean that the first-place winner is of award quality. It does say that the first-place winner is the best in quality of the class.

Furthermore, quality in one class as a whole can be superior to the quality of another class as a whole. So the number of blue ribbons in any given exhibit may not necessarily mean that other exhibits with fewer ribbons have less quality. Each exhibit must be judged on its own merits and flowers of superior quality must be judged against the total number of flowers in the same exhibit. Exhibits with a greater ratio of flowers of superior quality versus the total number of flowers in the exhibit would receive the highest score — up to 35 points.

Logically, an exhibit with all flowers of only average quality might receive a score of 17 or 18 points, assuming the flowers are all in good condition. From this point, quality must increase for the score to increase correspondingly. Thus, it should be obvious that close inspection of the flowers — and not the ribbons — is necessary to score quality in an exhibit.

Variety, 20 points — Variety is defined as a collection of different things or a varied assortment of things. Therefore, variety as applied to flower exhibits would mean a collection of different kinds of flowers — in this case, orchids. The greater the variety, the higher the score should be. A good way to calculate this is to count the number of genera represented in the exhibit. If 10 genera are displayed, then two points per genus

would give a full 20 points. Variations could be applied, for example, 20 genera at one point each or five genera at four points each. Obviously, the more genera represented in an exhibit, the better the final score in this category.

Once the principle has been chosen, then the actual number of genera in the exhibit multiplied by the selected number of points for each genus would give the final score for variety. The number of points is limited to 20, so the judge must decide how many points to assign each genus, based on the number of genera expected to be found in an exhibit of the size being considered.

It is logical to assume that the larger the exhibit, the greater the number of genera expected to be included in that exhibit. Most frequently, this is found not to be the case. Instead, larger exhibits usually contain a greater number of flowers of the same genus. Variety also has been defined by some as a varied assortment of plants within the same genus, for example, phalaenopsis. An exhibit may consist primarily of phalaenopsis, with flowers from eight to 10 different breeding lines. Some consider such an exhibit to have a great variety. Others consider such an exhibit colors represent variety. But is this the intent of the point scale of 20 points for variety? Surely not. Exhibits of all cattleyas or all phalaenopsis may make a spectacular display but do little to educate the viewer on the other types of orchids that are available in cultivation.

Education for the non-orchid grower as well as the veteran grower is part of exhibition, whether intended or not. Logically then, a display of several different kinds of orchids of the same genus or several flowers of widely different colors would not meet the intent and/or purpose of exhibition when recognizing variety in judging.

Labeling, 10 points — Here, the issue is not so easily resolved. Obviously, the use of labels is for identification purposes. Each flowering plant should be identified with its full and proper name and should be identified with its full and proper name and should be easy for the viewer to read. Labels serve that purpose. The easier it is to identify the individual plant by the label, the greater should be the score.

But it is easy to overdo the use of labels. They should be functional without dominating the display. Big, brightly colored labels can overwhelm the flowers they are supposed to identify. If the labels are the first thing seen by the viewer, then the purpose of exhibition has not been accomplished. Often labels are cut in a unique shape and made of a brightly colored material in order to carry out the theme of the show. In striving to follow this theme, the labels become quite obtrusive, dominating the exhibit. (The same can be said for props and foliage plants used in the exhibit.) The intent of an exhibit is to display flowers to their best advantage, not to exhibit labels.

Exhibits with clear and concise labels that are unobtrusive in relation to the flowers and the rest of the exhibit certainly would receive the highest score. While this aspect of an exhibit frequently is given a perfunctory effort by exhibitors, it is an important part of a well-presented display. Therefore, judges must give adequate attention to this detail when scoring all exhibits.

Finally, when considering exhibits in preparation for the scoring and voting on the show trophy, it is obvious from the foregoing that time and effort are required if the job is to be done with objectivity and integrity. Careful consideration will result in the best display being readily recognizable, making the decision easy. The practice of scoring a minimum of three of the best exhibits is useful, both in learning how to apply the principles involved and in readily recognizing the best of the best, particularly when the final choice is between two very good displays. Careful attention to detail is advisable at all times because the final decision may very well reflect both on the judge and, in turn, on the American Orchid Society.