

Ribbon Judging

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Ribbon judging gives judges the opportunity to hand out ribbons to the best flowers and plants at an orchid show, even though there might be only one entry in a class. Ribbon judging also helps judges become familiar with what is present at a show before getting down to the serious business of AOS judging. Most importantly, ribbon judging is an opportunity to educate society members, hobbyists, commercial growers and the general public about our avocation – orchids.

All too frequently, ribbon judging is treated as black sheep in the family of AOS judging. Even the Society's Handbook on Exhibition and Judging in its listing of minimum requirements to sustain accreditation allows one to attend eight center judgments and never be required to attend an orchid show (where ribbon judging takes place).

PURPOSE Ribbon judging offers the best training and learning experience for any judge: accredited, probationary and student. Assembled at a show are a wide variety of species, old standby hybrids, the latest in new hybrids and usually it's their best that exhibitors offer. The more one sees, the better one's discerning reference becomes. Even reading labels in exhibits can be educational – one can learn about recognizing incorrect spelling, incorrect identification, omitted award designation, proper nomenclature syntax and more. Many exhibitors are beginning growers and may not know this information, but judges should.

The opportunity to observe probationary and student judges evaluate, decide on the best from a large number of plants and support that decision gives an accredited judge an indication of progress in particular areas. It is also important to be able to form an opinion quickly and yet in the light of better information be willing to change one's opinion without becoming wishy-washy. The interaction of judges during the relaxed atmosphere of ribbon judging can be most revealing.

Ribbon judging presents an excellent opportunity to educate and interest others about orchids and the judging program. If there are 10 teams judging a show and three clerks on each team, 30 people will be guided through the process of evaluating orchids. That is where my own interest in becoming a judge was first sparked. (Do not forget about those "impressionable ears.") If a clerk has had an enjoyable, learning experience during ribbon judging, his or her enthusiasm will be taken to his society in the retelling of what he learned listening to the judges evaluate plants. It can be contagious.

Finally, for amateur exhibitors receiving ribbons, the recognition for them is an exciting high. The judges' attitudes should always encourage enthusiasm for orchids; saying, "It's just a ribbon," does not foster that attitude. If one has that attitude, one's edge in judging is lost. First-place ribbons are given to the best in the class. If there is only one entry in the class, it does not automatically receive first place. It needs to be held to a best or first-place standard. Judges should value the ribbons they award to the extent that what is given is deserved by the exhibitor. It is encouraging to amateur and some commercial

exhibitors to receive ribbons, by encouragement should be balanced against the integrity of the ribbon.

ETIQUETTE Miss Manners does not need to know anything about orchids to help with ribbon judging etiquette. The first item is the invitation. RSVP (respond, please) is mandatory. Answer in a reasonable amount of time. Most societies send a self-addressed stamped postcard. All that is usually needed is for an X to be marked in the appropriate boxes, a signature, and then the reply card needs to be mailed. If the reply is negative, that's the end of the story. If the invitation is accepted, the obligation begins. If one cannot fulfill this obligation, notification of the society is required. The society can then make the necessary adjustments in its luncheon plans. The judging chair also should be notified so adjustments can be made in team assignments. Having been the judging chair many times, it is a little disconcerting to have four or five judges not show up. This inconvenience requires a lot of last-minute reorganizing. Any judge may show up for AOS judging without having responded to or received an invitation, but it is rude (or impolite) to show up for ribbon judging when one has not answered the invitation. Each judge should arrive early, become familiar with the show schedule rules, canvas the exhibits for the AOS Show Trophy and screen for possible nominations for AOS judging. It is important to be familiar with the schedule as this determines what is eligible for ribbons and trophies.

When assigned as chair of the ribbon panel, there are basic courtesies to remember. Introductions should be made so everyone, including clerks, know each other's names even though name badges are worn. Then, as chair, a short explanation should be given on how the judging will proceed. For instance, the head clerk should announce the class, how many entries in the class and the location of the first plant. At that location, the clerk should announce the entry name and number. This way everyone knows the judging. Once everyone has seen the plant in the exhibit, step back so the exhibit is clear for other teams needing to see an entry in that exhibit. Sometimes judges and clerks need a polite reminder of this.

Since this is an educational opportunity for all involved, ascertain the level of expertise by asking if this is the first time clerking for anyone; then, offer help with the paperwork and ribbons. A courteous step is to encourage clerks to ask questions if there is something about the ribbon judging process they don't understand. Follow through with enlightening explanations. This usually takes very little time and leaves clerks with an enjoyable as well as informative experience. It also helps avoid misunderstandings based on limited knowledge about judging in general. Remember that judges are representatives of the AOS, the judging center and the judging system, and as such, provide a service that should promote orchid education.

Every ribbon needs a certain amount of information recorded on it. This is to ensure the plant and ribbon can be joined correctly if the ribbon is accidentally separated from the plant. The location or exhibit designation, class designation, the entry number and a judge's signature are a requirement for each ribbon. If ribbons are being filled out but

held until after judging is completed, it might be helpful for the clerk to include the name of the plant as well.

TEAMWORK All judges should be included in the process. Rotate, so each judge is given an opportunity to go first with an opinion. It is natural to feel more comfortable with the opinion of the more knowledgeable accredited judges but students and probationary judges should gain experience and confidence by forming and expressing their own opinions. It also allows for evaluation of progress toward elevation.

The team should stay together until dismissed by the panel chair. Once the team has finished the assigned tasks, the team chair should report back to the chair of judging for any further team assignments. If there are not any and the team is finished, thank each clerk for his or her help. Offer one more opportunity for questions. The judges can then be thanked and excused.

It is not the knowledge or even the lack of knowledge that steers one into trouble. It's usually one's mouth and one's foot and the engaging and disengaging of the two. There are ways to be critical of a flower without being unkind. Saying, "This flower was staked too late to give a nice presentation and it didn't get the best its genetics had to offer," is not nearly as crushing to the owner, who may be the clerk standing next to you, as saying, "It's a dog and it can't even hold its head up straight."

Ribbon judging is important and instrumental to the process of educating those in the judging system as well as the general public. It should also be an enjoyable experience for all participating. If we had a Judge's Ten Commandments, it has been suggested one should definitely be, "Thou shalt not insult exhibitors or clerks, thereby painting the AOS and all other judges with a bad brush."

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