

How Roses are Judged

By: Robert B. Martin, Jr., petrose@aol.com

Rose shows operating under standards established by the American Rose Society are judged by ARS Accredited Judges often with the assistance of ARS Apprentice Judges. Judging is normally done by judging teams consisting of three Accredited Judges or two Accredited Judges and one Apprentice Judge. Judges are usually selected from throughout the local area and typically receive no compensation for their services other than a free luncheon. They are thus motivated only by the love of roses and the fellowship of rosarians.

The process of judging anything necessitates the existence of standards. Novices seeking to lose their status as such should therefore learn those standards in order to present candidates (exhibition specimens) that the judges will admire and to which they will award a trophy.

The currently agreed set of rose judging standards is set forth in the ARS publication Guidelines for Judging Roses. For serious exhibitors this book is essential; for novices it is desirable. In fact even a rose show visitor will find the book useful, just as a descriptive catalogue or brochure is helpful in understanding a museum or art gallery. The book is a good buy at \$7.60 (including postage); order it from The American Rose Society book catalog. Read it carefully because the judges have done so and herein you will find much of use in preparing your roses for the show.

For the novice exhibitor a thorough knowledge of the Guidelines is not critical. Typically there is but one novice class, few of the competitors in that class are familiar with the Guidelines, and the judges are more forgiving in their assessments. But therein lies the opportunity to exit the novice ranks early. An entry in the novice class fitting the Guidelines will have a much higher likelihood of receiving the trophy. Accordingly let us here examine the Guidelines as they apply to the novice classes.

Avoid Disqualification

The first subject to address is that of disqualification. When a rose is "disqualified" it is removed from consideration altogether. By contrast a rose that is "penalized" for various faults simply loses points and can still be a winner. It is therefore fundamental that you must avoid disqualification.

Lest you head immediately for the exit be assured that disqualification rarely occurs (particularly in a novice class) and can be avoided with simply a little care. On the other hand it remains a real possibility should you get sloppy, much as an error in baseball. I have had entries disqualified on several occasions, almost always through carelessness or oversight. I have also seen entries from the very best exhibitors disqualified. It is embarrassing, but less so for the novice, and it can be avoided. Here then is a summary of reasons for disqualification most often encountered by the novice.

Misnamed. You have to write the correct name of the variety on the entry card and use the ARS show name. Judges can even get picky about the spelling. Take along your ARS Guidelines for Selecting Roses and check the name and its spelling even if you think you are sure.

Misclassified. You have to write the correct class in which you are entering on the tag. This is not a big deal. Look at the show schedule. If in doubt ask the person doing placement.

Unlabeled/Mislabeled. You must have an entry tag and must write your name on it. Many shows do not require you to fill out the whole thing -- check the show schedule to see or ask someone. Use waterproof pen with blue or black ink so that it doesn't become unreadable when a little water slops on it.

Stem-on-stem. With the exception of shrubs and old garden roses generally, entries are required to be exhibited on one stem. If the stem is exhibited with a portion of another stem attached to it the rose is disqualified. To avoid this cut off any piece of the prior stem when you are cleaning the rose so you don't forget to do this later.

Foreign Substance. You may not apply a "foreign substance" to the foliage, stem or bloom to improve its appearance. This doesn't mean that you can't wash the leaves with a little water; in fact you should do so as I will explain in a later column. The idea is to leave no residue. So forget about oil, green ink, floral clay, pins and wires.

Not Disbudded. Single stem blooms must be exhibited without sidebuds. Failure to remove sidebuds is grounds for disqualification. Sloppy removal requires penalization. Remove any sidebuds or sidebud residue when cleaning the rose.

Judging Factors

A single stem hybrid tea/grandiflora or miniature rose is judged by reference to six factors. These factors are discussed separately below; their relative values are discussed in the next section.

Form. "Form" is, and has been historically, the most important factor in the judging of roses. The determination of the existence of form is initially made by looking straight down into the bloom. The petals of a rose with exhibition form will be seen to unfurl in a perfect spiral from a point in the center. Roses showing more than one point in the center are said to have split centers. Roses with no clearly defined center point are often referred to as having muddled centers. References will also be heard to roses with a "hole" in the center, a "snubbed" center (one where a portion of a petal hides the center, or "blown" roses (the center has opened up to show the stamens). Note all these references are to the "center" of the rose and this is the key to understanding form.

The Guidelines will tell you that form is also evaluated from the side. An exhibition form rose is supposed to be one-half to three-fourths open and form a triangle with a high center. For novices however this is not as important as long as the rose is no longer a bud and is open enough to display a well formed center.

Color. "Color" is said to be made up of three elements: hue, chroma and brightness. This factor has nothing to do with the actual color class of the rose. This is supposed to be a neutral factor and the judge is supposed to judge mauve roses equally with white roses, even if he or she detests the color mauve. I suspect that many judges cannot tell you the difference between a hue and chroma and neither for that matter can I.

The real question is whether the color looks fresh so this factor depends in large part on the factor called "substance."

Substance. Substance is the amount of moisture or starch in the petals. Novices generally know this by the term "freshness." A rose with good substance looks and feels fresh. A judge is not allowed to feel the bloom; in fact the judge is not permitted to touch it at all. If it looks real fresh to you on close examination it will probably look fresh to the judge as well.

Stem and Foliage. The factor that usually separates the trophy from the blue ribbons in the novice section is "stem and foliage." Roses cut by novices for the home and office usually have short scraggly stems and dirty tattered foliage. A good exhibition rose is shown on a long straight stem with clean intact foliage. Select roses with straight stems and clean the foliage. After all, you would probably shower before going out on a date; the foliage of your roses will need one as well.

Balance and Proportion. The relationship between the bloom on the one hand and the stem and foliage on the other is known as "balance and proportion." This is one of these "you know it when you see it" kind of tests which requires experience so it is hard to describe to a novice. As a simple rule of thumb a stem on a hybrid tea should be about 18-21" long plus, depending on the size of the bloom. (Here I am speaking of the stem without regard to the height of the bloom head - since the height of a bloom head of a typical HT is 3-4" this means that the entry will be about 21-25" in height). The stem on a miniature should be around 6-7" long, again depending on the size of the bloom head.

Size. The last factor is the size of the bloom head. Bigger hybrid teas are supposed to be better. A miniature is supposed to be petite unless the variety is not usually petite. (I recognize that this latter statement makes little sense but it is a fair paraphrase of what is said in the Guidelines). Size is the one factor where there seems to be little uniformity of response among judges except in the fact that many judges seem to ignore it. It is not, however, a big deal in relationship to other factors and even less of one in the novice class so it can be easily ignored at this point.

The Point Scoring System

The point scoring system is the method by which the relevant values of the six factors are expressed. It is therefore important to know those relative values but do not imagine for a moment that the judges actually try to point score every rose. In fact they rarely do so at all. (If they did it would take all day and the winner would be the last rose to fade). It is nevertheless a valuable point of reference for communication and decision making and is worth committing to memory.

The point scoring system assigns the following relative values to the six factors.

The most important factor is form, which is notable by its presence. Most judges will not award a blue ribbon to a rose lacking form. "No form = no blue" is a useful slogan to remember. Don't waste time on roses which lack form, unless you have an abnormal interest in red, yellow and white ribbons.

Color and substance count for a lot of points but are usually noted only in their absence. Faded roses and those on their way stand out even to the non-experienced. So if your rose doesn't look faded don't worry too much about these two factors.

Stem and foliage together with balance and proportion outnumber form in the point category. However roses cannot overcome a lack of form by having great stems, foliage, balance and proportion. On the other hand, as I have noted, it is by these latter factors that the trophy winning blue ribbon winner is usually selected from the other blues, particularly in the novice class.

The bottom line for the novice is this: select a fresh rose with good form and you will have a blue ribbon winner. If it has a straight long stem with clean foliage you won't be a novice long.

Inflorescence

Novice classes normally call for single stem specimens of hybrid teas / grandifloras and/or miniatures. Some shows have a novice class for a floribunda spray and a miniature spray.

In novice terms a "spray" is a bunch of blooms on a single stem. A spray is judged on its "inflorescence." This is a fancy term which is useful in conversation; it has to do with the shape of the spray head.

For novice purposes the blooms in a spray don't have to be at the same stage of opening. Instead the importance is the existence of a pleasing visual effect in the inflorescence. A nice inflorescence presents a regular outline of the spray when viewed from above and the side. This could take the shape of a circle, an oval or anything else consistent and symmetrical. It is permissible and indeed desirable to clip off blooms which stick out like sore thumbs and mar the appearance, as long as you do it neatly. Although a spray can technically have as few as three blooms the winner usually looks like a small to medium bouquet of a half-dozen or more blooms.

As Easy as 1-2-3

The foregoing may seem like a lot of stuff to assimilate but it is not that tough. Most of it can be boiled down to three simple rules as easy to remember as 1-2-3:

- Fill out your entry tag carefully and accurately.
- Select only roses showing exhibition form.
- Cut the stem about as long as possible (avoiding stem-on-stem) and prefer straight stems with clean foliage.

As you might guess there are techniques to get your roses to meet this model which will be discussed later in this series. But do not forget that just as you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, you cannot make a winning entry out of a losing rose!