

# The 2014 Competitor's Guide to Staging Rhododendrons, Camellias and Magnolias

There are SIX RHS competitions in 2016 which ALL growers of rhododendrons, camellias and magnolias can enter:

- The Early Camellia Competition: 12–13 March, RHS Rosemoor
- The Early Rhododendron Competition: 9–10 April, RHS Wisley
- The Main Camellia Competition: 9–10 April, RHS Wisley
- The Spring Ornamental Plant Competition (which includes Magnolia classes): 9–10 April, RHS Wisley
- The Main Rhododendron Competition: 23–24 April, RHS Rosemoor
- The Harlow Carr Rhododendron Competition: 14–15 May, RHS Harlow Carr

Download the current year's Schedule and entry forms from the Rhododendron, Camellia and Magnolia Group website [www.rhodogroup-rhs.org](http://www.rhodogroup-rhs.org)

Decide which of the competitions you are interested in entering, then go around your garden and note plants which are likely to be in flower in time for the Show. Complete your entry forms, submitting your best estimate of what you are likely to bring to the Show. Try to be accurate so that the Show organisers can allocate the correct space, but they are very flexible and adaptable at times of frosts and heat-waves and additional entries are never refused, so bring what you can on the day.

## General Guidance

- 1 *Read the schedule carefully* – there are restrictions on various things and the judges will look out for them. Pay close attention to height restrictions and remember that 'a spray' means one single branched stem, and 'a truss' is one single flower truss.
- 2 Choose the best flowers you have, but remember they may be staged up to 24 hours before judging, so they should not be *quite* fully open so that they look their best on the following day.
- 3 Fill in the small name cards sent to you with your entry cards in case you don't have time at the Show. Add the Collector's number, if there is one, and the parentage of a hybrid where known.
- 4 Transport blooms carefully to avoid bruising. Don't forget to label them for your own use, and transport them in 'cool' bags or standing in bottles placed in crates. As you become more experienced you will develop your own method of transportation.
- 5 Bring moss, scissors, secateurs, cloths or wipes and a pen or marker to fill in name cards for late entries.
- 6 If you have a lovely flower but are unsure of its name, don't worry, bring it to the Show anyway as there are stewards on hand who should be able to help identify entries and put them in the correct class.

- 7 Cut clean, unblemished trusses, remove dead and tatty leaves and gently cut away any obvious dead stems or spent flowers from spray entries.
- 8 Wipe the leaves clean with a baby wipe or damp cloth to remove dirt and algae (but *not* indumentum).
- 9 Choose a vase (provided by the RHS) of an appropriate size for the bloom.
- 10 Place the truss/spray in water after making a cut to base of stem.
- 11 Make sure that the truss sits well in the vase for the judges to see. Add moss/shredded paper to help a heavy truss or spray stay upright in the vase but make sure the moss or other material does not come above the top of the vase or points will be deducted. Decide how the bloom looks best and set it on the bench accordingly, to 'catch the judge's eye'.
- 12 Make sure the vase is clean and the specimen is well labelled. Place the name card just in front of the vase.
- 13 Check the entry card has the correct class number on it, your exhibitor number and your personal details on the back. Place the card with your personal details face down, so that each entry is anonymous to the judges and the class number is clearly showing. The card should be just tucked under the base of the vase so it is clear which exhibit belongs to which entrant.
- 14 Watch what others are doing, don't be afraid to ask for help from the steward or show organisers – that is what they are there for – but be careful not to distract other exhibitors at their busy time.
- 15 Attention to detail takes time, but you must be ready to leave at the allocated time for judging. During judging, go and have a well-earned coffee break, talk to other exhibitors and then return to see how your exhibits have performed.
- 16 Have a notebook with you and take time to look at other entries, spot the varieties which have caught the eye of the judges, and learn from others' success or failure in equal measure.
- 17 Next time you enter, be prepared to help novices by sharing your experiences and any tips you have picked up which helped you.
- 18 Most of all, ENJOY the experience!

### **Specific Guidance for Rhododendrons**

- 1 If you are in doubt about which Class to place your bloom in, the Stewards will have copies of the *RHS Rhododendron Handbook* and *International Rhododendron Register* available to help.
- 2 If you dare, ease open any unopened 'pips' and gently tease individual corollas to balance the flower head.

## **Specific Guidance for Camellias**

- 1 The Schedule describes the various forms of camellia. It's a good idea to read this beforehand so you have an idea which Class your camellia bloom belongs in.
- 2 An old wives' tale suggests putting the stem of a cut camellia bloom into a grape, to keep it fresh during transport.
- 3 When cleaning the leaves, pay special attention to removing insects such as scale, sooty mould and water streaks.
- 4 Special vases are available for miniature blooms – seek them out, and ask if you can't find them, a miniature looks so much better in a tiny vase and this exercise is all about presentation.
- 5 There are no hard and fast rules about how many leaves to retain with your bloom. Judge for yourself whether one or two leaves show the bloom off better but, generally speaking, camellias show better with at least one leaf, without any they may look 'undressed'.
- 6 If you are still in doubt about which Class to place your bloom in, the Stewards will have a copy of the *International Camellia Register* available to help.
- 7 If your bloom has not been grown outside, ask the steward for a 'red dot sticker' and place it in the top right corner of the name card. This informs the judge that it is a bloom grown with protection and helps them judge the whole Class fairly.

## **Specific Guidance for Magnolias**

- 1 Magnolia flowers on side branches often grow at an angle to their stem, so try to choose flowers from an upright shoot if possible.
- 2 Magnolia sprays often require additional weight in the vase to balance them so it is most important to choose the appropriate vase to support them. Additional material to prevent the vase tipping over may be required, sand or gravel are often used for this purpose. Be especially careful to clean the outside of the vase if this sort of material is used.
- 3 Magnolia flowers should always be displayed upright, so those with angled stems may need to be propped up with moss or some other material to achieve this.