

A GUIDE FOR JUDGING DAHLIAS

This guide is intended as a way for judges to work through collecting the information they need to assess a flower. The intention is to be consistent with the “Standards and Judging Rules” as previously published.

Many judges might do some of the steps quickly and in combination - what is critical is each step is covered in developing a view of the exhibit.

As a general proposition faults visible from the front should be considered as more major than those only visible from the back of the flower.

Form is worth the most points (40) and should be the starting point for any assessment. The exhibit with the best form is often the winner. Other things such as condition, stem and colour might be easier to see and can at times dominate a judge’s view. Starting with an assessment of form can help reduce this.

Unlike some countries, in Australia, we do not classify varieties by type and size. Rather the judge must assess each bloom for size and type irrespective of the name.

The general approach to assessing an exhibit is the same no matter what type of dahlia we are looking at. This checklist will start with some generic question the judge can ask about each exhibit and then more onto type specific question with an emphasis on regularly seen faults by type.

Form (40 points)

Form is asking how closely does the exhibit approach the standard described. In all cases a judge will be looking at the symmetry of the flower, the petal formation and the depth of the flower.

On approaching an exhibit, the judge will ask

1. What type is this? Where the exhibitor has identified a type the judge will assess the entry against that type. Where a type is not specified the judge should select the type they think it most closely approaches the standards. The type is determined by the petal formation at the largest point of the bloom.
2. What size is this? Size is determined when the flower is first judged. The size is measured at the widest point of the bloom.

Looking from the front of the bloom

3. Is this flower round?
4. Do the petals sit symmetrically -no matter how a bloom is cut in half it should look the similar and balances on both sides?
5. What does the centre look like? For fully double types it should be fully closed and in proportion to the flower. For open centre types the flower should have fresh pollen that is clean and bright.
6. For fully double types how high does the centre sit compared to the face florets?
7. Do the petals sit in rows with each row doing the same thing ie the petals in the row all look the same?
8. Does the form of the florets progress evenly and in a stead fashion from the centre?
9. Are there gaps in the formation? Are the petals in each row evenly offset from the one above and below?

Looking from the side

10. How deep is the bloom? Does the depth match the standards? This varies by type with too deep and too shallow both being major faults.
11. Do the petals sit in rows with each row doing the same thing ie the petals in each row all look the same?
12. Do the rows sit evenly and build to the back of the flower or are there large gaps between some rows or a dramatic change in spacing between rows?
13. Are there pin petals ie petals of a different form making the petalage uneven?

Looking from the back

14. Do the petals hold form through the flower or is there a dramatic change in formation?

It is then up to the judge to assess how closely the flower comes to the standard. In all case faults visible from the face of the flower should be given a higher weighting.

For individual types there are some key things for the judge to look for.

Pompon

- Is the flower round from front, back and side views?
- Do the petals form round tubes throughout the flower, including as it reflexes to the stem?
- Are the tubes a similar size throughout the flower?
- Does it reflex to the stem?
- Is the centre fully closed?
- Does the bloom sit on top of the stem with the centre facing upwards?

Ball

- Is the flower round from front, back and side views?
- Do the petals form round tubes throughout the flower, including as it reflexes to the stem?
- Does it reflex to the stem?
- Is the centre depressed from the face florets or pushing up to allow for a circular outline from the side view?
- Do the tips of florets appear rounded or blunt but not pointed?

Semi-Decorative

- Do the florets **appear** pointed?
- Are the florets fully involute for more than a quarter but less than half? Many are never fully involute.
- From a side view do the petals hold their form? Not elongated at the back leading to a comet like shape.
- How consistent is the petal formation around each row?
- Is the centre level with the face florets? A depressed centre is a major fault.

Formal Decorative

- Is the flower round? Many formal decs are not round.
- Is the centre "closed"?
- Is the centre level with the face florets?
- Are the florets broad and smooth?
- Do the petals sit neatly back on the intersection of the ones below and do they fold straight back?
- Are the petals in proportion to the size of the flower and how many of them?
- Do the back petals fold and flatten back neatly towards the stem? If they twist this is considered a fault.

Informal Decorative

- Are the petals wavy or slightly twisted? Is that twist or wave symmetrical?
- Is the centre cone shaped and as high as the surrounding florets?
- Do the florets recurve towards the stem?

Waterlily

- Are there 4 to 7 rows of florets?
- Is the centre closed and dome shaped?
- Is the side view a saucer shape?
- Do the outer florets cup?
- Does the flower look delicate and light in appearance?

Cactus

- Is the centre cone shaped and at least as high as the face florets?
- Do the revolute edges overlap from the tip for at least half the length, at the widest point of the flower, preferably two thirds?
- Are there gaps in formation or outline? Do the petals sit with each row offsetting the one below?
- Is the depth at least two thirds of the diameter but not more than the diameter? Depth is often a fault!
- Are the petals in proportion to the size of the flower?
- Petals should be gently incurved or straight - not sweeping back to the stem
- Rows of petals should be clearly discernible from the side and evenly spaced.

Semi Cactus

- Are the petals broad at the base and revolute with edges overlapping from the tip for more than a quarter (but less than a half) of their length?
- Is the formation of petals in each row consistent?
- Do the petals sit offsetting from the row below so there are no gaps in the flower?
- Is the centre cone shaped and at least as high as the face florets?
- Are rows of petals discernible from the side and evenly spaced?

Exhibition (also known as Incurve) Cactus

- Is the flower round?
- Is the spread of petals evenly around the flower or is it bearded?
- Are the florets very narrow with the revolute edges overlapping for almost the full length?
- Do the florets look like tubes rather than looking flattened?
- Do the florets strongly incurve or curve in one direction?
- Is the depth more than half the diameter but not more than two thirds?

Fimbriated Cactus and Other Fimbriated Types

- Does the flower meet the requirements of the type without fimbriation?
- Does each petal split into two or more points that are splayed apart giving a soft appearance?
- Are the petals evenly fimbriated in each row of petals?
- Is the fimbriation sufficient? In miniature blooms it should be at least 10mm and in larger blooms it should be in proportion to the overall size.

Collerette

- Are there 8 petals?
- Are the outer florets equal in size, broad, flat and rounded with no gaps showing at the base?
- Is the collar big enough to see clearly and evenly formed, but not more than half the length of the outer florets?
- Are there fresh pollen bearing stamens? No pollen and stale pollen are both a fault.
- Does the collar colour contrast with outer florets? This is preferable.

Single

- Are there 8 petals?
- Are the petals broad, equal in size and overlap with no gaps showing at the base?
- Is the side view flat?
- Are there fresh pollen bearing stamens?

Orchid

- Is the bloom flat from the side view?
- Are there fresh pollen bearing stamens?
- Are there 8 petals?
- Are the petals involute for the whole length, and fully involute with edges overlapping for more than half?
- Is there a colour contrast between the sides of the florets? This is preferred.

Anemone

- Is the side view dome shaped?
- Is the dome made up of tubular florets for its entirety?
- Are the outer florets evenly sized, broad regularly arranged and flat?

Stellar

- Is the centre cone shaped and as high as the face florets?
- Are the outer florets narrow and involute (but not fully involute?)
- Is the depth at least half the diameter but not more than two thirds?
- Is there a colour contrast between the sides of the florets? This is preferred.

Peony

- Is the centre open with fresh pollen?
- Is the flower almost flat?
- Are there 2 to 4 rows of petals?

Miscellaneous Types

- Symmetry is critical
- Is it just a poor example of another type or is it fundamentally different?

Once you have asked all these questions (which can be very quick) you can split the 40 points for form up into the following three smaller blocks:

- Out of 16 how close is it to the standard type - is the petalage "right" and are there pin or malformed petals. Is the depth right? Is the flower round?
- Out of 16 for how good the centre is - closed, green or sunken, stale or no pollen in open centres are all faults.
- Out of 8 points for build - are there gaps, or is it overcrowded or sparse? Are the petals in proportion to the bloom size?

Condition (25 points)

Condition is perfect when the bloom is mature but remains fresh, with both firm substance and a fine texture, and with no dirt, marks or damage.

- Does the bloom look fresh?
- Is the substance of the florets firm?
- Is the texture fine - do any florets look stressed particularly at the back?
- Is the bloom damaged?
- Are there marks, spots or dirt on the bloom?

To help in assessment you can break the 25 points into

- 10 points for substance - are there withered or droopy florets?
- 5 points for texture
- 10 points for damaged or dirty florets or presence of insects

Stem (15 points)

- Is the stem at least 160mm clear of the vase?
- Is the flower held at 45 degrees to the stem (except for poms which face straight up)
- Is the stem straight?
- Is the stem into the centre of the flower?
- Is the stem in proportion to the size of the flower?
- Are there any notches or marks on the stem?

A judge can allocate 5 points each to flower angle, how straight and clean is the stem, and does the stem hold the flower properly.

For example a flower held well at 45 degrees to the stem but with a bend in the stem might score 5 plus 5 plus 2 might score 12. At the same time a flower that sits on top of the stem (other than a Pom) but with a clean straight stem into the middle of the flower might score 1 plus 5 plus 5 might score 11 for stem

Colour (10 points)

Colour is not about what the judge likes or does not like. Rather colour should be clear bright and even with each petal in a row the same

- Is the colour even, with each petal in a row having the same appearance?
- Is the colour vibrant, not dull, faded or bleached?

Size (5 points)

For flowers shown 1 stem to a vase size is by definition correct (as long as they meet the size requirements of the class) so they score 5 points. Vases of 3 or even 5 are discussed below.

Staging (5 points)

- Is the staging neat with the stem emerging from the middle of the vase?
- Has the exhibitor “dressed” their flowers and removed any dead or dying florets?
- Is the labelling neat and legible?
- Does the bloom face the judge?
- Is the staging material below the rim of the container?

Further Considerations When Judging

How many points to deduct?

Pointing is about the judgement of the judge about how much to deduct for each fault. There are some absolutes but points should be allocated relative to the standard of the show on the day.

Judging vases of three (or 5)

To effectively judge vases of three (or 5) for form, condition and stem the judge might judge each flower separately then divide that score by the number of flowers. For each point category and in particular colour, the flowers should match and points should be deducted for differences.

All bloom should be measured to ensure that they are all of the same size and meet the class requirements. Size is expected to be the same so points are deducted for size differences between flowers, especially if there is a mix of sizes, ie small and miniature in the same vase.

Judging championship classes

The same standards apply to each vase in a multi vase championship, but there are a few steps that judges should add:

1. Before judging starts a judge should satisfy themselves that each entry meets the schedule requirements. If an entry does not meet the requirements and local rules allow, then an exhibitor should be asked if they would like to change their exhibit. If the schedule does not allow for this then the goal of the judge is to still to ensure that an exhibit is not found NAS. If a certain number of types is required, which the judge doesn't believe has been met, then the exhibitor can be asked to supply the type that they want each vase to be judged against. If it is a size issue, then again the exhibitor can be asked what size they want each bloom judged against. Based on this the judge will then down point as required. These actions **should** exclude the exhibit from winning but mean that if another vase within the exhibit was consider Best in Show it could still be awarded such.
2. Before looking closely at any vases the judge should assess each entry for presentation. This can be done from a number of paces back from the bench. The exhibits are then ranked with the rankings recorded and used to decide the outcome when points are equal. In some cases prizes are also awarded for presentation alone.
3. A vase is then selected as the reference vase and assigned points. All vases are then pointed against that vase. The reference vase is normally one the judge thinks is an "average" vase in the championship class.
4. The championship class should be judged vase by vase ie all the vases in the front row then all the vases in the middle row and then all the vases in the back row.

Other Things to Consider

1. A judge is required to understand the need to be ethical, unbiased and impartial. Some thoughts on these requirements follow at the bottom of the page for your consideration.
2. Colour is not what the judge likes or dislikes. There are many historical examples of judges who's colour preferences were well known and this has been seen to have an impact on their decisions. A judge must be careful to guard against that. Equally a judge must be careful with preferences for or against certain sizes or types or even varieties.
3. A judge must not be scared to be questioned about their decisions. In fact it should be encouraged. The key is to be able to explain the reason for a decision- the decision is the judge's but it helps us all if people know why.
4. Avoid preferences like "new is better" or xyz variety always has abc fault.
5. As in the judging of many flowers there is a risk that the judge will place too much emphasis on what is easy to see (damage and stem) and less emphasis on form.

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Ethical

- a) Pertaining to or dealing with the principles of morality; pertaining to right and wrong in conduct.
- b) Being in accordance with the rules or standards for right conduct and practice, especially the standards of Judging.
- c) To judge honestly and with principle.

Unbiased

- d) You have to be 100% fair and not have favourites or opinions that could colour your judgments.
- e) Being able to judge fairly because you are not influenced by your own opinions.
- f) Not affected by others influence and or opinions.

Impartial

- g) Judging only on the merits of each bloom and to be balanced and objective.
- h) Not swayed toward one exhibit over another.
- i) To be neutral by not showing favouritism.