

GCO Judges' Council  
JUDGING STANDARDS CLARIFICATION COMMITTEE

Report to Judges' Council May 2023

This is a report on some of the questions the committee has received, researched, and discussed. We will publish more topics periodically.

**Mandate for this committee:**

We are not rewriting OJES. We are trying to clarify what is already in OJES for all GCO judges.

We are happy to receive your questions and comments. Please do jot down queries about OJES as you encounter situations in judging that seem unclear.

**TOPICS covered in this report:**

1. **Soil in Design**
2. **Touching Designs**
3. **Touching Horticultural Specimens**
4. **Distance from Design when Judging**
5. **Zooming in on an image in a Virtual Show**
6. **Two Definitions for Display**
7. **Painted Fresh Plant Material in a Special Exhibit**
8. **Applying the Scale of Points to Cacti & Other Succulents**

**SOIL IN DESIGN**

The design section in OJES does not mention soil, but it is covered in the definition of soil on pg. 151:

*Soil – The upper layer of earth in which plants grow. No soil is permitted in floral design. Sand, pebbles, wood chips, etc. are permissible.*

So, designers may use clean sand, clean pebbles, and clean wood chips. Sphagnum moss is sometimes used as a growing medium, Mosses may be used in design as long as they are clean and free of soil.

Soil can be used in Special Exhibits, but not in Design.

Other organizations, e.g., African Violet Society, National Garden Clubs Inc., may have different rules.

Soil contains inorganic minerals, organic material, gases (air), and liquids (water). The organic components may include decomposing plant material, microorganisms like bacteria and fungi, invertebrates like worms, and insects at different stages of their life.

## TOUCHING DESIGNS

Only the exhibitor, or the show chair or their designate are ever permitted to move a design after placement. Care should be taken if moving a design – is it still in the same orientation as the designer displayed it?

Pg.13 in OJES states:

*k) Placement of Exhibits – ... Design and Special Exhibit entries should not be moved after placement except by the exhibitor, and only in exceptional circumstances by the Show Chair or their designate. Horticultural entries may be moved by the show committee for subdividing classes and/or for spacing on show tables.*

Always keep in mind that the show schedule is still the law of the show. Other organizations, e.g., Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies, may have different rules and conventions.

Judges should not be touching designs, with one exception – corsages. Judges can carefully pick up and examine corsages. Pg. 136 in OJES states:

*...Factors to consider are the size and technique, including the reverse side, and the accessories...*

Rationale for not touching designs – may damage the plant material and/or disturb the way the designer has organized the material and/or alter the viewing angle of the design.

## TOUCHING HORTICULTURAL SPECIMENS

Judges may pick up fruit and vegetable specimens for judging (OJES 2019 ed., page 107). Fruits and vegetables are usually displayed on a plate, and it is often necessary to pick them up to examine the underside and, for types such as melons and squash, to gauge their weight. Even though handling them is permitted, care must be taken to avoid marring any natural bloom or damaging the specimen in any way.

Scented herb classes are another exception. Pg. 74 in OJES, the section under Herbs, states:

*For a scented class judges must be permitted to carefully touch plants.*

Judges may not touch other types of horticulture specimens. Why only fruits and vegetables and scented herbs and not other types of entries? The natural oils and salts on our hands may damage the entry (i.e., bruising or accelerating the deterioration of flower petals and/or foliage, marring the natural 'bloom' on Hosta leaves/Iris stems/succulents, etc.). For potted plants, the damage could ruin the plant

permanently. It is also possible that pathogens could unknowingly be transmitted to a plant or from one entry to another.

A judge may carefully lift horticulture specimen containers for better viewing or ask a clerk to do so but only if it can be done safely and without altering the presentation/pose of the specimen or causing damage to the specimen itself and/or other entries on the table.

A judge may also use a pencil to gently 'touch' the specimen to lift a leaf (i.e. overlapping foliage in a multi-stem entry), to check for turgidity, etc., but always with extreme care to prevent any type of damage.

If a judge has a major concern, he or she may ask the clerk or the show chair to lift the specimen (**cut specimens only, not potted plants**) from the container for viewing, again with great care.

Not all club/society shows will have a passing committee. Walking the show before starting to judge allows judges to gage the quality of the entries and how he/she will need to pace themselves to complete judging on time. It is also an opportunity to identify entries that may be problematic and discuss the issues with the show chair so they can be resolved before judging starts.

#### **DISTANCE FROM DESIGN WHEN JUDGING**

The convention has been to stand 3 feet (91 cm) from the design, directly in front of the design.

In some situations, you may have to use your discretion as to the distance to stand from the design, e.g., for large floor designs you may need to stand back further to see the whole design; for mini and small designs you have to be closer to assess them.

Corsages, as mentioned above, can be picked up to view them more closely.

Craft classes may have to be viewed more closely to assess the techniques used.

The schedule should state how the design is to be viewed and judged.

#### **ZOOMING IN ON AN IMAGE IN A VIRTUAL SHOW**

Experience says yes, it is Ok – especially as it is more difficult to see details in photos, and photography skills vary.

Some details of careful craft work require a closer look.

Screen size and visual acuity vary. Viewing a design on a cell phone screen vs a large screen with your pc is quite a difference in scale.

In live shows we may take a closer look if two designs are very close contenders. Similarly, in a virtual show it may help to take a closer look when deciding between two close contenders.

## **TWO DEFINITIONS FOR DISPLAY**

The definitions for Display in the OJES glossary, pg. 137, may be confusing because there are two definitions for two different things.

The 1<sup>st</sup> definition refers to a **Display in a Special Exhibit Division**. The information and scale of points on pgs. 118 – 119 also apply to this type of display. The definition gives a long list of possible types of things to include in a display. It is up to the schedule to specify which of these types are to be included in the class, and how many specimens of each are required.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> definition refers to a **Display in an Educational Division**.

It may be useful to pencil in Special Exhibit beside the 1<sup>st</sup> definition and Educational Division beside the second in your copy of OJES.

## **PAINTED FRESH PLANT MATERIAL IN A SPECIAL EXHIBIT**

No, for growing plants. Paint can damage them. It also makes it difficult to assess colour, condition, etc. It is not permitted in classes in the Horticultural Division (see glossary definition of Painted Plant Material, pg. 146 in OJES 2019).

Since Special Exhibits combine design and horticultural perfection this may be a bit of a grey area as some shows are now allowing painted fresh plant material. So, the schedule will govern whether it is allowable to include painted cut plant material in Special Exhibits.

## **APPLYING THE SCALE OF POINTS FOR CACTI AND OTHER SUCCULENTS**

Judging cacti and other succulents can be intimidating. The difficulty lies in applying a scale of points (OJES 2019 ed., p. 43, 2.2) that allots 40 points for foliage to plants that mostly do not have typical leaves, if any. In order to apply the scale, it is important to understand that the bodies of these plants are succulent stems and are the main site for

photosynthesis (usually the function of leaves). The stems may be branched or not, i.e., cacti with pads vs. those with globular bodies.

Foliage Quality (30 points):

Except for issues regarding form, consider the condition of the plant body.

Faults include:

- damaged/broken or missing spines (or leaves if present)
- smaller sized and quantity of spines on species which have spines. A change in culture can negatively affect the normal production of spines, often visible as a change between the older robust growth and newer, weaker growth of the plant body.
- damage or scarring – down point more heavily when closer to the growing point. Realize that damage low on a stem could be 30 years old. Corking, the browning and/or peeling at the base of old stems, is normal as some species age and is not a fault.
- signs of pest damage, rot and/or sunburn

Foliage Colour (10 points):

- the colour of the plant body and of any spines (if the specimen has spines) should be true to the species/cultivar.