

EXHIBITING CAMELLIAS

by Shirley Shallcross

Showing or exhibiting your camellias is another way of learning about and appreciating these beautiful blooms. To be a good exhibitor you must grow good flowers but you must also learn what qualities make a good flower so that you know which one to pick and how to stage your bloom to show it off to its best advantage. In doing this I believe we gain a greater appreciation of camellias and also improve our growing techniques to achieve better results.

To grow show quality blooms we need to start at the end of one flowering season to get ready for the next. Firstly, plants need to be pruned regularly once they are more than a few years old. If plants are let get too large the quality and size of blooms tends to diminish over time. It is better to start early and not let plants get too large. Pruning is also covered on our website, but it should be done during September before the plant goes into its new growth.

A good, regular fertilising programme is also essential to get show quality blooms. This also is covered elsewhere, but a little and often is a good approach to adopt. Also, some extra potash in autumn is a help to colour and size of blooms. A good quality proprietary camellia fertiliser should also contain added potash.



*Remove inferior side buds,
leaving terminal bud.*

Disbudding is also a good practice when you are looking for extra size in blooms. This can be started in February or March when the difference between flower buds and growth buds can be seen. It is best not to disbud all at the one time and buds pointing downwards are best left as they are not usually damaged as much by weather or birds. Leaving some smaller buds growing progressive down the stem will also provide a succession of blooms.

As show time approaches plants need to be inspected regularly and any leaves or twigs that could damage opening blooms should be pegged back or even removed as clean, unmarked flowers are what we are striving for.

To exhibit flowers you need to learn what the judge is looking for in the blooms and also what exactly the schedule is asking for.

The points that the judge looks for in each bloom are:

* **Form** – this is the shape of the bloom which should be characteristic of the variety in all its variations. Symmetry in outline is important except where the normal form is asymmetrical. The three examples of the formal double, J. Nuccio's Gem shown below show three form considerations.



Unsymmetrical



Excellent form with intact bud center



Past it's best-blown bud center

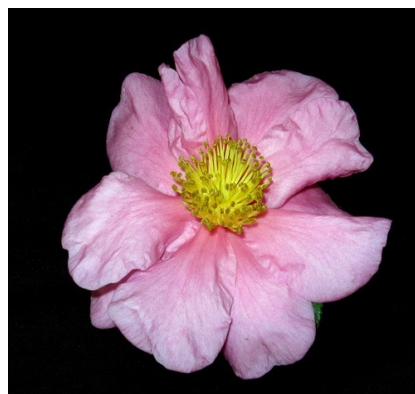
* **Condition** – the freshness of the bloom which is indicated by the standing of the petals, firmness and color of the stamens and freshness of the pollen, freedom of the flower from insect or disease injury, torn petals, discoloration or damage by weather or handling. When foliage is part of the exhibit it should be clean and free from damage as well. color, texture and substance all indicate the freshness of a bloom and a fresh, young bloom is more desirable than a bloom that is past its best. This is where practice and experience help in learning which blooms to exhibit. The best form of a flower is another quality which is learned by experience as many varieties can vary in form on the one plant and there is usually a preferred form for showing.



Inferior form of Flower Girl



Flower in poor condition



Flower Girl displaying better form

* **Color and Markings** – colour should be clear, bright and not faded or dull and typical for the variety.

* **Size** – should be the best that can be expected for the particular variety. The larger bloom – other factors being equal – will usually gain the award, except in special size classes.

* **Texture and Substance:** – texture is the surface characteristic of the petals and includes sparkle, sheen and brilliance. Substance is the thickness or thinness as is characteristic of the cultivar as well as the firmness of the petals.

* **Presentation:** - is also taken into account by the judge and this can make a big difference to the appearance of a bloom. Exhibits should be staged to show the bloom to its best advantage. Foliage is optional in staging, however, the presence of one or two leaves usually enhances the presentation.

Leaves should be clean and may be attached or unattached to the bloom. It is often best to remove the leaves and then place them behind the bloom as they sometimes grow facing the wrong way. No additional buds other than the bloom should be present. This would not apply in the stem or spray classes where multiple blooms and buds are preferred.

In **Multiple Bloom Exhibits**, if the class calls for One Variety all the blooms whether it be two, three or more, should be as even as possible in size, form and color.

In **Different or Distinct Varieties** classes color and form should be combined to give an attractive appearance to the exhibit. Blooms should be from different varieties in these classes.



Nice multiple exhibit-Note size graduation to front & colour pairings



Not so good multiple. Size matching good, not so colour matching. Also note leaf missing from top left bloom.

When exhibiting it is important to study the classes and rules in the schedule to make sure you understand what is being asked for in each class. If in doubt, ask for help, as a bloom which is placed in the wrong place will be disqualified and even if it is the best bloom in the show it cannot be considered for any award once it has been disqualified. All exhibitors should purchase a copy of the Camellia Nomenclature Book in order that they can stage their blooms in the correct classes.

You will need to know the names of your blooms and whether they are japonicas, sasanquas, reticulatas or hybrids and also the form or shape as this is what many classes will ask for in schedules. A good starting point for novice exhibitors is at monthly meetings of your camellia society or general garden club meetings where monthly competitions for exhibiting are usually held.

As mentioned at the start, exhibiting adds another dimension to camellia appreciation and cultivation, so give it a go. Many novices have won Blue Ribbons at their first show!