

## The JUDGE's Corner

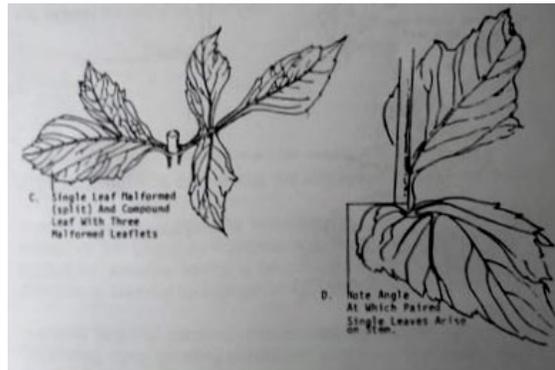
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Isn't it just great to have the season underway! I'm almost completely planted as of this writing and all of those dahlias in the garden are promising to be perfect! :-) There is only one major issue now; the slugs would love to be working on those tender little shoots. If I didn't have the ground around them covered with slug bait, a lot of them would have disappeared by now. I think it is interesting that only certain plants and areas have slugs, many others don't show any evidence of slime. Why is that?

I received some questions about last month's column, largely related to being able to see, in the pictures, the foliage and stem faults I was talking about. Perhaps the example of foliage on the right was reasonably clear. It shows a "pair" of leaves. The leaves are compound; they are very similar in size and shape; and they set opposite one another on the stem. That is, they are a good example of a pair of leaves. The questions arose more from the pictures of foliage faults.



The schematics in the Judging Manual (p. 29 and 30) might have been more effective. The example on the right illustrates a couple relatively minor faults: an unbalanced pair of malformed leaves and a pair of leaves that do not lie opposite one another on the stem. I don't remember ever penalizing leaves for being malformed. That condition, in any case, comprises a minor fault. As always, however, the degree of the fault depends on its severity and extent. Check the Manual for other examples.



In summary, the Judging Manual provides the following key comments on foliage.

- Pairs of leaves should be opposite and balanced and the first pair should frame the bloom.
- Leaves should convey health and vitality.
- Distortion of the foliage can be a major fault.
- In show competition, ideal foliage will be free of insect injury, spotting, mildew, and mechanical damage.
- Scars from disbudding and disbranching should be minimal.
- Missing and trimmed foliage are major faults.
- The diameter of the bloom, the length of the stem, and the size of the foliage should be in pleasing proportion.
- An entry must have at least one pair of leaves.
- While stair-stepping leaves are a major fault, a pair of leaves attached to the stem up to an inch apart is a minor fault (!).

This last point is certainly not intuitive (to me, at least) and reflects the importance of actually reading the Judges Manual. It says, in effect, that judges need to be lenient in the requirement for a pair of leaves. In that context, I want to revisit a statement I made in my last column about a 10 point penalty on an entry that lacked a pair of leaves. It is included again here, on the right. I was, no doubt, too harsh. The penalty should be substantial, but not 10 points.



While the Manual also talks about eliminating an exhibit from competition based on obvious signs of disease, our current knowledge of virus makes it clear that it can only really be diagnosed by detailed scientific evaluation. My counsel is to employ the “health and vitality” criteria but do not “eliminate” an entry based on suspected virus.

It is, no doubt, clear that the evaluation of Stem and Foliage are closely interrelated. The Manual frequently discusses

them together. The key characteristics of a good stem include:

- The stem should be strong and erect and possess good form and proportion.
- For large blooms, the stem should be as long as the diameter of the bloom; it can be longer for smaller blooms.
- The stem should be round and smooth.
- The diameter of the bloom, the length of the stem, and the size of the foliage should be in pleasing proportion.

Following are some examples of foliage and stem issues from recent shows.

What foliage and stem faults do you see regarding the nice entry on the right? (We might as well start with a good example!) As I see it, the unpaired leaf (pig ear, in the Midwest) would be better if it were behind the stem/bloom instead of on the side. Otherwise, the stem is straight and strong; the pair of leaves are equal and close to opposite; and the bloom, stem, and foliage are in good proportion. This entry probably deserves 19 or 19.5 out of the 20 points for stem and foliage.



You probably wouldn't say the same thing about the entry on the left; neither would I. Perhaps the first thing you notice is that the stem is not straight. While it is hard to distinguish the individual leaves, it is clear that there are not nice individual pairs of leaves framing the bloom. In addition, the sets of leaves do not form a nice triangle leading up to the bloom. Rather, they appear more like a block or cylinder of leaves below the bloom. I would say that the combination of scores for Stem and Foliage would be below passing for this entry; i.e., well less than 17.

What do you think about the stems and foliage on the triple entry on the top of the next page? Certainly the leaves on that center bloom leave something to be desired. Recall from above that a "pair" of leaves can be displaced by as much as an inch, so the entry does meet that ADS requirement. They are clearly not, however, equal and



opposite. The foliage on the other two blooms are better. The blooms themselves are small so the diameter of the stems is sufficient. They are, however, very long and they vary substantially in length. What would you conclude about the score for stem and foliage on this example? If each of the stems and foliage were like those on the bloom on the left, my score would be 10 for each. The foliage on the center bloom would lead me to a failing score for the entry on that attribute, per-

haps -2. I would suggest passing the entry on Stem at, say, -1.

The two blooms on the right were entries in the Ball section at our DSO show last fall. The contrast in Foliage between the two entries is remarkable! It is clear that the leaves on the yellow entry are too small. They are not in proportion to the size of the bloom or the length of the stem. What about the bloom on the left? My immediate impression in looking at the picture was that the first pair of leaves are too big. However, if you pretend that the second, lower, pair of leaves were absent, are they really too big? Maybe a little. Here is a case, in my view, where that second set of leaves detracts from the entry. The first set of leaves is in reasonably good proportion to the stem and the bloom—but they're sure too big for the second set of leaves.



Please change the target date for the judging seminar in my garden from September 14 to September 21. I hope to be able to set up both Seedling Bench Evaluations and Trial Garden simulation evaluations of open-centered cultivars that afternoon. Enjoy your gardens and those dahlias! *Ron*