

EPSOM GARDEN SOCIETY



‘HAVE A GO AT A SHOW’ FRUIT CRIB SHEET

1 – Fruit comes in two categories: tree fruit and soft fruit, the latter are berries, often grown on a bush. Once established, fruit takes a gardener less time and energy as each plant, tree or bush, will provide a harvest over several seasons.

2 – However, in order to grow good quality fruit, each plant needs to be encouraged to produce fruit in the quantity, and of the quality, desired. Follow the advice for each type of fruit. Before purchasing a fruit tree understand if it is self-pollinating, eg Stella Cherry, or whether it needs a companion tree, eg, apple trees of the same pollination group, to assist the production of fruit. Ensure that you have the space, soil and position to provide the plant(s) the right conditions to flourish; once planted keep them well watered until established.

3 - Trees need to be pruned at the right time of year: fruit containing a stone should be pruned during the summer months and those with pips pruned in the winter, but not in extreme cold. In the season prior to fruiting the plant should be mulched with (home-made) compost or well-rotted manure to help retain moisture. When fruit is developing it should be watered in dry weather: for trees at least a can a week and other fruit in proportion. If you feel the need to spray a plant never do so when in flower as killing the pollinating insects means few flowers are pollinated. As someone who encourages wildlife it's ironic that I then need to protect my fruit to discourage birds, squirrels, field mice and slugs from denying me the fruits of my labour. I grow strawberries in hanging baskets from metal poles inside a metal fruit cage and have an electronic mouse deterrent in the greenhouse as I discovered that field mice are very partial to ripe melon.

4 – One well-tended loganberry or blackberry or can produce enough fruit to eat fresh & freeze for later use. Other berries, ie, raspberries or strawberries require several plants to produce a bowlful; consider planting early and late season varieties to extend the season. Blueberries have come to prominence over the last few years, they require acidic soil; I grow mine in large pots in the fruit cage. I used to grow them in the greenhouse until I found our female blackbird was raising her brood on my blueberries as I'd opened the door for ventilation. Field mice, I discovered are especially partial to a ripe melon.

5 – So, how to you display your fruit and enter it in an EGS Show? Start by reading the EGS Handbook, which gives Hints for Exhibitors on page 4 and the quantity of each of fruit in a class on page 25. Beware of entering, eg, cooking apples in a dessert apple class, as this will earn you a ‘NAS’, ie, not as schedule.

6 – Before emailing the classes you wish to enter examine the quality and quantity of each type of fruit. Tree fruit can be picked a day or two ahead, ideally pick soft fruit early on morning of the Show. Choose fruit of even size, colour & shape with no blemishes. Consider how you'll display it (on a white paper plate?), check the quantity & take spares especially for delicate soft fruit. Pack it carefully; I use hand towels for stone fruit and kitchen towel, in a plastic box, for soft fruit. Arrive in plenty of time on the Saturday morning to arrange your display calmly and attractively and always make a final count. And if you know the variety, label it.

7 – Once the Show is open look at the other exhibits in the classes you have entered. Why are some displays considered to have been a better exhibit than others? Learn from other exhibitors to help improve your own display.