

Botanical Arts  
A Cautionary Tale



Has your club caught the Botanical Arts bug yet? This ever-widening Flower Show Division has become a veritable catch-all for botanical creativity and includes everything from espaliered houseplants and Fairy Gardens to realistic, wearable items made from plant material. Even Photography now sits within this division.

As the Handbook itself decrees, ***“Botanical Arts is a Division.....that allows for additional types of Horticulture, Design, and art-like exhibits.”***

As one Master Judge recently interpreted this statement to a garden club member, *“I think of Botanical Arts like the ‘Any Other Class’ in a Horticulture Division’s schedule. If it doesn’t quite fit the other named Divisions, it’s probably Botanical Arts. That’s not to say anything goes, but it sure allows for a wide array of creative expression.”*

The Botanical Arts Division now includes four distinct sub-divisions: Botanical Horticulture, Botanical Design, Botanical Artistic Craft, and Photography. One or more of these may be included in a Standard Flower Show.

Flower shows all over the globe are adding larger and larger floor space to this Division. Philadelphia delegates about 20% of personal exhibitor space to jewelry,

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collage, and displays. Sydney, Australia is allocating 30% of its floor space to Artistic Craft, including jewelry, handbags, and embellished creations.

While Botanical Arts is both a boon for flower show event planners and creative exhibitors, it can be a potential nightmare for judges and schedule writers who are quickly having to adapt to the explosion of demand. After all, how do you apply specific rules and judging guidelines to something with such wide margins of aesthetic potential? It is partially obvious; each sub-division would apply its respective Scale of Points. Horticulture would apply the Horticulture or Combination Planting Scale of Points. Design would use the Design Scale of Points, and Artistic Craft would use the Artistic Craft Scale of Points. As a Master Judge, my answer lies in three essential components: Scale of Points, Schedule Writing, and a Judges' willingness to humbly and flexibly learn how to apply both when judging.

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## **SCALE OF POINTS**

Botanical Horticulture employs either the Horticulture Scale of Points or the combination Planting Scale of Points.

For Arboreal, Dried and Preserved Specimens, or Espaliered exhibits, etc., the Horticulture Scale of Points is used.

### **I. All Cut or Container-Grown Horticulture Specimens and Collections**

(Arboreal, Flowering, Foliage, Fruit/Vegetable/Nuts)

| Criteria                  | Value (points) |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Conformance               | 5              |
| Plant Identification      | 5              |
| <b>Peak of Perfection</b> |                |
| Form                      | 20             |
| Color                     | 20             |
| Maturity/Size             | 20             |
| Condition/Blemishes       | 15             |
| <b>Grooming/Staging</b>   |                |
| Grooming                  | 10             |
| Staging                   | 5              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>100</b>     |

For Landscapes, Fairy Gardens, and other Artistically arranged plant combinations, The combination Planting Scale of Points is used.

### **II. Combination Plantings and Gardens**

| Criteria                  | Value (points) |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Conformance               | 5              |
| Plant Identification      | 5              |
| Labeling                  | 5              |
| <b>Peak of Perfection</b> |                |
| Form                      | 10             |
| Color                     | 10             |
| Condition                 | 10             |
| Show-worthy Size          | 5              |
| Overall Effect            | 30             |
| Creative/Distinctive      | 5              |
| Grooming                  | 10             |
| Staging                   | 5              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>100</b>     |

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For Botanical Designs, like Collage, Plaque, Pot-et-fleur, hanging designs, wreathes, swags, garland, or Exploration Designs, the Design Scale of Points is used.

### IV. All Designs

| Criteria                   | Value (points) |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Conformance</b>         |                |
| To Type                    | 7              |
| To Schedule Requirements   | 7              |
| <b>Design Principles</b>   | 48             |
| Selection of Components    | 8              |
| Organization of Components | 8              |
| Expression                 | 8              |
| Distinction                | 14             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>               | <b>100</b>     |

For Botanical Crafts, like decorated items (gift boxes, napkin rings, holiday trees, etc.) and wearable items (jewelry, purses, hats, etc.) , the Artistic Scale of Points should be used.

### VI. Artistic Crafts

| Criteria                                      | Value (points) |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Conformance                                   | 14             |
| Design                                        | 48             |
| Craftsmanship/Technique ( 12 points for each) | 24             |
| Distinction                                   | 14             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                  | <b>100</b>     |

For Photography, a Photography Scale of Points must be used.

### VII. Photography

| Criteria                         | Value (points) |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Conformance                      | 5              |
| Interpretation of Class Title    | 10             |
| Composition                      | 25             |
| Artistry/Creativity              | 25             |
| Technical Achievement            | 25             |
| Distinction/Impact (Wow! Factor) | 10             |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                     | <b>100</b>     |



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## **SCHEDULE WRITING**

**When writing a flower show schedule, every description and guideline should relay to the exhibitor exactly what is provided, what is allowed, what is restricted, and what is expected. One helpful approach is to write the schedule with the assumption that the exhibitor is completely unfamiliar with the space.** The description should paint a picture detailed enough that the exhibitor can picture the space in their minds before beginning their exhibit. The Schedule may also include a picture of the staging that awaits each exhibit.

Each of these guidelines should also align with the Handbook for Flower Shows. In fact, it is helpful to include a reference to the Handbook page within the description. This invites the exhibitor to dig a little deeper before taking the plunge.

Similar to describing a Design exhibit, each Botanical Arts class description should include the spatial parameters for the exhibit. For example, “exhibits must not exceed 24”w x 24”d x 36”h.”

A Staging description is essential. For example, “each exhibit will be staged on a 42”h black pedestal, with a black base of 20” x 20”, provided by the show committee.”

Atmosphere is also extremely helpful. For example, “each exhibit will be staged against a light gray wall under fluorescent lighting.” This information can make or break a designer’s plan. As we all learned in Flower Show School Course I, LIGHT and COLOR are two of the essential elements of good design. Imagine an exhibitor bringing in a 36” h design of all white components and then seeing their design disappear against a similarly colored wall.

In addition, knowing how it will be viewed by judges and visitors is also helpful. For example, “these exhibits will be viewed from three sides and judged from the front only.” While we all do our best as designers and crafters to finish all sides, it helps to know when you can fudge the mechanics and when they will be visible from a side view.

A staging description may also include such items as a picture holder description for a collage, or the type of hook upon which it can be hung, as well as a weight limit for a hanging exhibit. Collages can get heavy. Pedestals can get knocked over. Jewelry is often displayed on special stands of black velvet or molded plastic. Hats usually sit atop mannequin heads of styrofoam or plastic, in black, white, or flesh colors. Knowing these things really helps the designer plan accordingly.

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This example from the 2027 WAFA Flower Show is an excellent example of an exhibiting description, listing all parameters. The exhibitor is told the exhibit type, dimensions, staging, and viewing information.

| <b>CLASS 11</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>PAPER PLAY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Childrens class from 7 years – 11 years</li></ul> <p>This class must be pre-done. It can be sent by mail or brought in by a person who is registered and attending the show to be staged by a steward.</p> <p><b>Sponsored by:</b><br/><b>David and Sharryn Place,</b><br/><b>New South Wales</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>A necklace</b></li><li>• Staged on a supplied black necklace holder</li><li>• Space allowed: 20.5cm high, widest part of the shoulder is 13.5cm</li><li>• Exhibit will be displayed on a grey tiered bench</li><li>• Viewed and judged from the front</li></ul> |  |

### **REALISM vs EMBELLISHMENT**

Unlike the Horticulture and Design Divisions, Botanical Artistic Craft requires one monumental addition to the schedule writing. **Each exhibitor should be told whether the item should be Realistic or Embellished.** There is a significant difference between an embellished gift box and a plant-made, realistic gift box. The embellished gift box is an actual gift box that has been creatively enhanced by fresh or dried plant material and may still show parts of the original object. Plant and floral materials enhance but do not necessarily cover 100% of the exhibit. In contrast, the plant-made realistic gift box is crafted from scratch by the designer to mimic a real gift box, and all visible components must be made from plant material. The finished, plant-made gift box, must look exactly like a real box, and should almost fool the eye.

[CAPTION FOR BOXES PICTURE] The gift box on the left, crafted by Lorraine Van Wickler, is EMBELLISHED. The gift box on the right, crafted by Barbara Chan, is REALISTIC. Both exhibitors created beautiful entries and both followed the schedule's description but they are almost impossible to judge against one another because the schedule did not specify if the entries should have been Embellished or Realistic. In a perfect world, both Embellished and Realistic can be included in a show, but should not be judged against each other.

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### PLANT MATERIAL REQUIREMENT

Another overlooked part of Botanical Artistic Craft schedule writing is a required description card for materials used. Including this as a requirement serves two purposes. First, it proves that the exhibitor used raw plant material components within their exhibit. Second, it helps the judge and the general public to see the mechanical components now hidden under layers of craftsmanlike treatment.

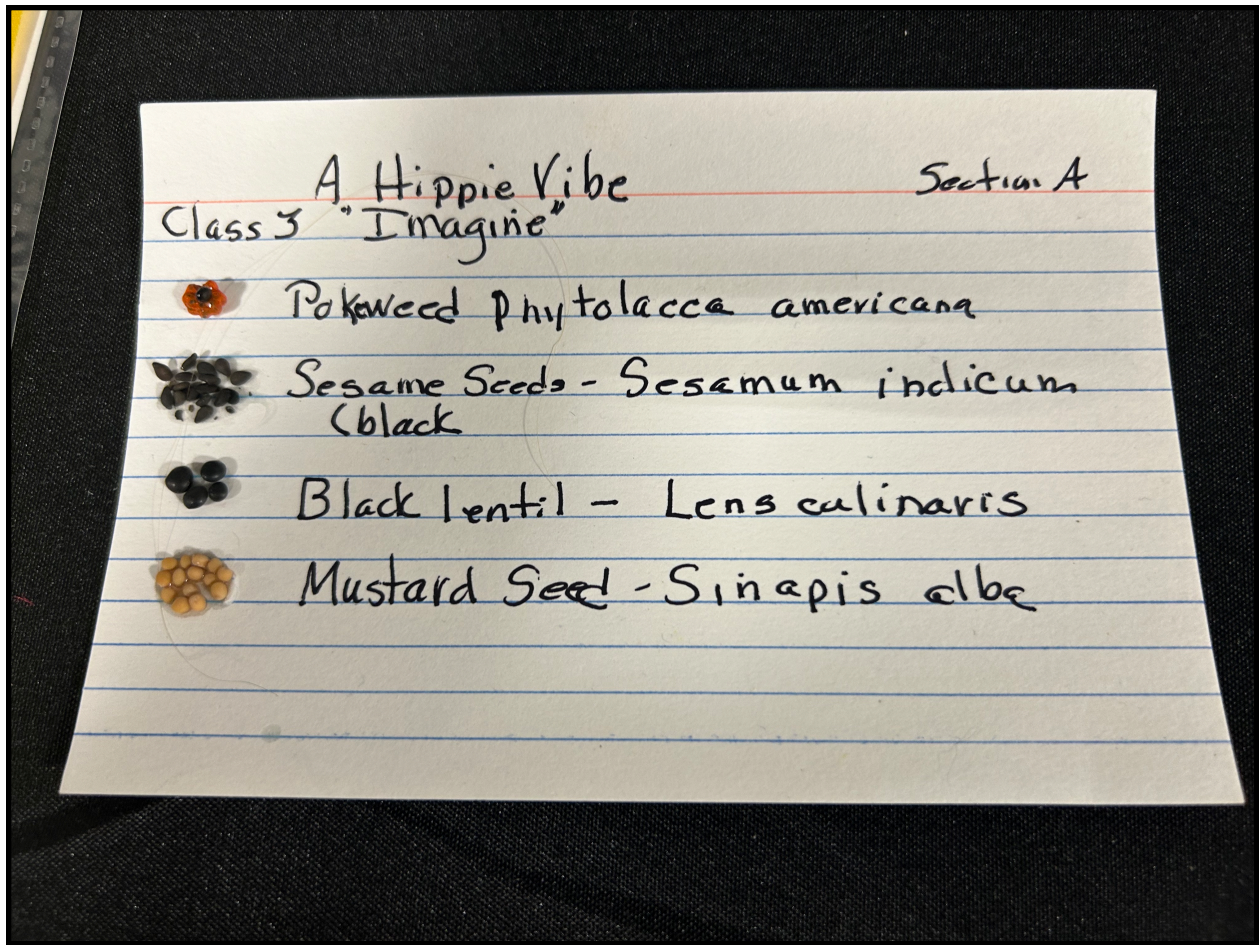


In this Botanical Arts Artistic Craft Section, Class 3. "Imagine" was listed as a Realistic Peace Symbol Pendant, not to exceed 3"h x 3"w and must include a bail or ring to be hung on a 2mm black leather cord, provided by the show committee.

Each exhibitor must list all plant materials used (with botanically correct name), and provide raw samples of each, attached to the 4" x 6" index card. The card is supplied by the show committee.



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[CAPTION: Elaine Jarrett's Peace Pendant, entered at the 2024 Charleston Flower Show is an example of Realism.]

Some items that lend themselves to Embellishment include accessories like purses, sandals, high heels, belts, and hats. Items that lend themselves to Realism include purses, hats, pendants, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets.

### **JUDGE'S HELPFUL HINTS**

Having judged many Botanical Arts exhibits, here are some questions that I found helpful before applying the respective Scale of Points.

Does the schedule provide a detailed description of the aforementioned requirements?

Is it Realistic or Embellished?

If Realistic, does it fool the casual glance by appearing like the real thing?

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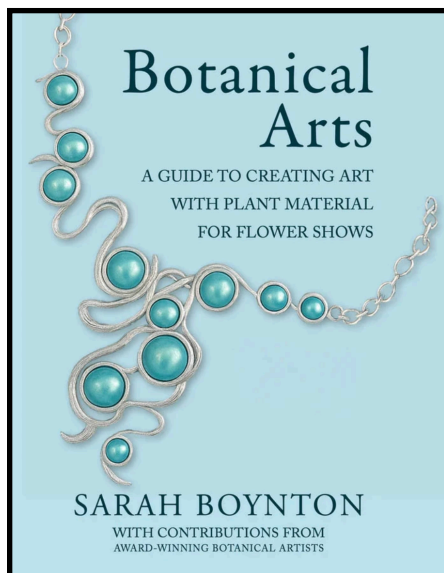
If Embellished, does the embellishment enhance the object or overpower it?

Is it truly wearable? This often becomes an issue with hats. A wearable hat should be able to be lifted off of the mannequin and placed on your head. While a judge can never touch a design, the wearability should be obvious.

Does it appear functional? Purses sometimes fail this test. An embellished purse must appear functionally usable without destroying the embellishment. A realistic purse must appear obvious to carry and contain a clasp or something that makes it appear just like the real thing.

Sandals and heels are other examples of things that are often crafted beautifully, but are sometimes tragically non-wearable. Often, plant material is mistakenly placed where a foot should go. While many exhibitors cover the insole, it should still have enough room for the foot.

### **FURTHER STUDY**



There are many resources for further study in Botanical Arts, especially jewelry and other wearable Artistic Crafts. Sarah Boynton's book, *Botanical Arts*, provides a wealth of helpful tips including how to find raw materials, how to use paints, nail polish and jewelry tools, as well as considerations for exhibiting.

Sarah has several YouTube videos and can also be invited as an instructor for hands-on workshops.

### **FLOWER SHOW PHOTOS**

The following major flower shows have included Botanical Artistic Crafts in their shows and pictures of these shows can often be found on Facebook, Instagram, or Pinterest:

WAFA, The World Association of Floral Arrangers  
CFAA, Creative Floral Arrangers of the Americas  
Boston Flower Show

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Philadelphia Flower Show  
Charleston Flower Show  
National Capital Area Flower Show  
Atlanta Botanical Garden  
San Diego Botanical Garden