

## SETTING UP CONTESTS IN PLANT IDENTIFICATION TIPS FOR AGENTS AND LEADERS

Plant identification contests are helpful in stimulating interest and reinforcing the learning experience. The contest need not be difficult or involved to achieve its objectives. The following suggestions will be helpful in setting up a contest.

Select and use only plants observed on tours or discussed at club meetings. Plants in county contests should be selected from a list such as the one for the Plant Identification Contest at the State Fair.

Plants are more difficult to recognize out of their natural surroundings. A tall fescue plant can easily be recognized in a pasture but is more difficult to identify as a dried mount or as a single plant on a table. Keep this in mind when setting up the contest.

Essential parts of the plant (leaf, root, rhizome, stolon) must be present for identification. Include a flower and/or seed head if possible. Plants selected for identification contests should appear normal or have a natural growth habit.

Use fresh plants rather than pressed specimens whenever possible because of their natural appearance. They can be brought directly from the field to the contest. If plants must be held for some time or if the weather is extremely warm, wrap plants in damp towels or place in water to keep them fresh. Plants can be kept in a natural condition for several days if potted in gallon cans filled with wet sand.

Pressed specimens can be used for plants that are not seasonally available. Dried plants are more difficult to recognize, and club members should be familiar with the characteristics used in identifying pressed plants.

Contests in plant identification should include a few seeds of cereals and cultivated plants. Keep seed collections in numbered glass vials and ready for review or use in a contest.

An important part of any contest activity is a review of the judging class after the contest is completed. Give participants an opportunity to go through the class of plants and discuss the identification and characteristics used to identify particular plants. This is helpful in reinforcing the learning experience and provides an opportunity for learning about new plants.

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