

SETTING UP CONTESTS IN PLANT IDENTIFICATION

Tips for Agents and Leaders

Job# QC
Rec'd: 1-11-91
New Count = 1013 - 5
Shelfcount = 252
= 1-11-91
Last Inv = 175
= 1-11-91
Initials: mp

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.

Leaders should 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.

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

Fresh plants are preferred over pressed specimens 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, they can be wrapped in damp towels or placed in water to keep them fresh. Plants will remain 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. Seed collections in numbered glass vials can be used for review or a contest.

An important part of any contest activity is a review of the judging class after the contest is completed. Participants should have 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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Reprinted July 1990

4-H 1005L



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