



Preparing Entries for the 4H Tobacco Exhibit Kentucky State Fair



Bob Pearce Extension Tobacco Specialist

Tobacco remains an important part of Kentucky's overall farm economy and provides a significant proportion of the income for several thousand Kentucky farm families. The 4-H tobacco exhibit at the State Fair continues to provide youth from these families the chance to showcase their skills in crop production and their heritage of tobacco farming. Participants in the tobacco exhibit can also earn a little spending money from the premiums offered to the top exhibitors. There are classes for green stick, potted plants, and cured leaf in both burley and dark tobacco. Here are some tips to help you prepare a high quality exhibit for the tobacco department.

State Fair Requirements

Stripped Tobacco

- **For burley tobacco** (classes 6-10) an entry consists of two hands containing at least 20 leaves each.
- **For dark-fired tobacco** (classes 30-32) an entry consists of two hands of at least 8 leaves each, and an entry of dark air-cured tobacco (classes 33-35) consists of two hands of 15 leaves each.
(Note that classes 30 through 35 are not 4-H specific classes, but are open to any one under the age of 18 as of August 1 of the current year.)
- There is a "best crop" (class 18) for **burley** tobacco. An entry consists of 2 hands of 20 leaves from each of four stalk position grades: flyings, lugs, leaf, and tips. Samples entered in the stripped leaf classes shall not be considered in this class. Exhibitors must have a separate set of hands for entry in the best crop class.
- There is also a class for **dark** (fire or air-cured) tobacco best crop (class 38). An entry consists of 2 hands of 20 leaves from each of four grades: wrappers, heavy brown leaf, dark leaf, and thin brown leaf. Samples entered in the stripped leaf classes shall not be considered in this class. Exhibitors must have a separate set of hands for entry in the best crop class.

Green Tobacco

- There are classes for green stick burley (class 48) and dark (class 43) tobacco. Each exhibit of green tobacco consists of 4 stalks speared on a stick.
- Entries in the growing plant classes for burley (class 51) and dark (class 46) tobacco consist of a single plant in a pot or other suitable container.

Planning:

Stripped Tobacco

- Entering the stripped leaf classes requires some advanced planning since the leaves will need to be collected at stripping time and preserved until the State Fair in August.
- Cured tobacco leaves need to be properly stored to preserve their initial quality.

- Leaves should be stored in light case (about 17 to 18% moisture) to reduce the chance for mold growth and/or rotting.
- At 18 % moisture the lamina or web of the leaf will be pliable, but the stems will still be somewhat brittle. If the leaves are completely limp such that the stems can be folded without breaking, the hands should be allowed to dry slightly before storage.
- The tied hands should be loosely wrapped in plastic carefully packed in boxes to reduce chances of physical damage to the sample.
- They should be stored in a cool dark location to avoid temperature fluctuations and exposure to sunlight. If feasible they may be refrigerated at 38 to 40 degrees F.
- Several days before the Fair the samples may need to be misted or steamed to bring them in case to be handled. However, excess moisture can discolor cured tobacco and mold may develop.

Green Tobacco

- Green Stick Tobacco that has been topped for at least 3 weeks generally exhibits better than freshly topped tobacco.
- Spear the stalks about 12 to 16 inches from the base taking care to avoid split outs.
- Green stick entries should be wilted for a better presentation, but must still be in a green stage.
- Take care with handling and transport of the entry to avoid bruising. One of the most common mistakes seen by the judges is an otherwise good entry that has been handled roughly.
- Some exhibitors place 5 or 6 stalks on a stick to have a spare or two in case of damage during transport. It is the responsibility of the exhibitor or their agent to select the four stalks to be considered by the judges at the time the exhibit is entered.
- Potted Tobacco -Typically these are plants that have been grown in the field and are transplanted to the container just prior to the Fair.
- A five gallon bucket is a suitable container, but a plastic pot of similar size makes for a more attractive display.
- Carefully dig around the selected plant to get as much of the root ball as the container will hold. Line the pot with a plastic bag and place enough soil in the bottom so that the original soil line will be aligned 3 -4 inches below the edge of the pot. Place the plant in the pot and backfill with soil around the root ball, tamping as necessary to keep the plant sitting straight.
- Water the plant as needed, but be careful not to over water. One of the most common mistakes seen in the growing plant classes is a plant that has been over-watered; this leads to a loss of roots causing the plant to wilt.

Judging Criteria:

Stripped Tobacco

- Entries will be judged based on appearance and uniformity, and on how the samples compare to expectations for a particular stalk position with regard to color and body.
- Neatly tied hands will enhance the appearance of your exhibit (see below for an explanation of hand tying).

Green Tobacco

- Stick Class - In general you want to select four stalks of uniform size without insect, weather or disease damage. Green stick tobacco will be judged on uniformity, general appearance, and quality.
- Potted Class - Growing plants will be judged based on size, general appearance, and the presence or absence of disease or insect problems.

Kentucky State Fair 4-H Tobacco Awards

- In addition to the individual classes, awards are offered to the best exhibit and the best overall exhibitor.
- The best exhibit award is given the individual class winner that is considered to be the most outstanding example of the ideal characteristics for its class.
- To be eligible for the best overall exhibitor award an exhibitor must enter at least 3 of the individual classes.
 - The exhibitor will be awarded points based on their placement (10pts for 1st place to 1pt for 10th place) in each of 3 individual classes.
 - If an exhibitor has entered more than 3 classes, the top 3 placements will be used in determining their score.
 - The exhibitor with the highest total score will be awarded a plaque offered by the Kentucky Department of Agriculture.
 - In the event of a tie the winner will be determined by the exhibitor winning the most blue ribbons.

For official information regarding the classes, eligibility requirements, entry deadlines, and premiums offered please see current year's version of the Premium List and General Rules published by the Kentucky State Fair Board.

How to Hand Tie Tobacco

At one time almost all burley and dark tobacco was sold tied in hands. Farmers took a great deal of pride in making sure that the hands were uniform and neatly tied. Taking the time to properly tie hands will enhance the appearance of your State Fair exhibit. Begin by aligning the butt end of the collected leaves making sure none are sticking up above the rest. Hold the leaves in one hand and gently squeeze to compress them. Select an attractive leaf to serve as the tie leaf and fold it in half or thirds until it is about a 3 inch wide band. Grasp the tip end of the tie leaf and begin wrapping it around the butt end of the other leaves. Continue wrapping until only about 3 to 4 inches of the tie leaf remains, then gently open the leaves and tuck the butt end of the tie leaf between them. If you have trouble, just ask an older tobacco grower for help. They would be delighted to show you the “lost art” of tying tobacco hands.

