

Protocol for the Conduct of Australian Extra Virgin Olive Oil Shows

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Chairman, Australian National, Royal Adelaide, Royal Perth and Royal Canberra Extra Virgin Olive Oil Shows

The major capital city shows in order of when they first were conducted are as follows: The Australian National, Royal Adelaide, Royal Sydney Royal Perth, Royal Canberra, Royal Melbourne and Royal Brisbane.

All but the Australian National are held under the auspices of the Royal State Agricultural and Horticultural Societies, but are organised by the respective state olive oil associations. The Australian National is organised by the peak olive body in Australia: The Australian Olive Association (AOA). All but Royal Sydney is conducted in the way described below.

Processing Exhibits prior to Judging

The submitted bottles are sent to an accredited laboratory for testing. Free fatty acidity is always checked, and sometimes peroxide value. Where the show has a style based class system (i.e. Mild, Medium or Robust) the polyphenol level is also measured as this measure is a good proxy for style. If an oil fails to meet the chemical criteria set under the show rules then the exhibit is disqualified and not subjected to further judging. Most shows use the International Olive Council FFA limit for extra virgin olive oil of 0.8%. However, the FFA level can be set lower than this at the discretion of the organising committee.

Where style based classes are used, the Chairperson will verify that the oil has been entered into the correct class by tasting them and by considering the polyphenol level of the oil.

Preparing Exhibits Prior to Judging

At the close of entries, the steward randomly allocates each exhibit a number. The identity of the exhibits and their allocated numbers are known only to the steward. On the morning of judging, the exhibits are poured into uniform dark bottles labelled only with their allocated class and exhibit number.

Judge Selection and Allocation to Classes

The organising committee in consultation with the chairperson extends invitations to prospective judges. Typically judges are growers/oil producers or marketers. However, the panels may also include chefs, food writers, oil researchers, or indeed, anyone who has a solid understanding of olive oil quality. Associate judges may also be invited if they have a previously demonstrated ability for oil judging. Many associate judges have undertaken a show judging course that is conducted by the Australian Olive Association from time to time.

Judge Allocation to Classes

The steward allocates judges to classes in such a way that any judge who is also an exhibitor is never in a position to assess their own oil, nor to influence another judge who has been given the task of doing so. For example, if a judge is an exhibitor and they have oils entered in class 2 and 3, they will judge (and only judge) oils in Class(es) 1, 4 or 5.

Judges from different panels are forbidden to taste oils allocated to other panels or to talk to judges in other panels. Failure to observe this rule will result in the judge instantly losing their commission. Therefore there is no possibility that an exhibiting judge can influence the outcome of the class in which their oil has been submitted.

Judging panels are also constructed in such a way that the amount of overall experience is relatively even across panels. That is, very experienced judges are usually teamed up with newer judges wherever possible.

How the Oils are Judged

Before the start of judging, the Chairperson provides general judging instructions, mostly concerning application of the previously published judging criteria.

The steward divides the judges into panels of three plus one associate judge, and allocates them to a particular class or classes. Typically, 15 to 25 oils are assessed by each panel each day. Where a class is larger than 25 exhibits, it is split and judged by two different tasting panels, or the class is judged by the same panel over two days.

The Chairperson nominates one experienced member of each panel to head that panel.

The tasting is conducted in a single round, assessing for both defects and overall quality using a 20 point scoring card.

The oils are independently assessed in a different order by each of the three judges.

Discussion between judges at this point is forbidden. If the judges have questions, they must direct them to their panel head or to the Chair (if it involves tasting issues) or the steward (if it involves protocol). The steward is not permitted to divulge any information regarding any oil.

After independently assessing the oils, the judges then meet as a group to discuss the oils individually, and to agree on a quality score (out of 20 points). It is noteworthy that the oil scores are not averaged as averaging results in a large number of 'middling' scores and a flat distribution of medals. The discussion is moderated by the head judge of the panel. Some oils are flagged for retasting and further discussion. If agreement cannot be reached within a reasonable time, the head judge may seek the opinion of the Chair. Once referred, the Chair's decision concerning an appropriate score for that oil is final.

Gold (17.0+), Silver (15.0-16.5) and Bronze (13.0-14.5) medals are allocated consistently on the basis of the agreed score. More than one medal of each type can be awarded within each class. Conversely, no medals may be awarded in any class if the overall quality of the class is deemed lacking.

Many shows award best of class awards. If so, the panels are instructed to unambiguously select what they consider to be the best oil of the class. In the case where a class has had to be split over two panels, the head judges of each panel confer to select the best oil. The Chairperson has the casting vote when agreement cannot be attained.

At the other end of the quality scale, if the judges all consider that an oil is defective, then it is referred to the Chair who arbitrates on their fault status. If the Chair agrees that the oil is defective, then the panel is asked to allocate a score less than 10.0 for that oil and to record the defect.

The Chair tastes all oils awarded 17 or more points so as to confirm their gold medal status. Although the chair may demote the candidate oil, this power is rarely exercised. Typically when changes are made, it is done solely to ensure that there is consistency

between judging panels, i.e. that oils awarded medals in one class are of equivalent quality to equivalent medal winners in other classes (i.e. those awarded by other panels). However, the chair usually attains class consistency by diplomatically advising the panel during their discussions that their judging pattern is either excessively 'tough' or 'easy' in relation to the other panels and that some modification on their part is necessary. If no gold medals are awarded by a panel, the Chair will typically ask to taste all of the most highly rated oils, and if in their opinion believes that an oil or oils are of gold medal standard they may promote the oil. However, this is typically done in full consultation with the panel involved and is done whilst taking the opinions of the individual judges into consideration.

In the rare event where there is a possibility that the Chair may have an indirect association with an exhibit, the steward will advise the Chair, and will delegate the Chair's duties to the head judge of the panel involved. Any decisions concerning oils in that class will lie solely in the hands of the delegated head judge.

How Best of Show is Determined

All gold medal winning exhibits are eligible for consideration for the trophy for Best Oil of Show.

All judges excluding the Chairperson and associate judges are involved in the selection of Best of Show.

Firstly the candidate oils are assigned different codes to those originally used during judging. The judges taste and compare the candidate oils and rank them as being 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc in order of quality. The rank sheets are collected by the steward and tallied.

In the event that a judge is also an exhibitor of a candidate oil for best of show, the steward excludes their ranks from the total count. The judges are not informed that this has occurred as doing so would alert them that one of the candidate oils is associated with a particular judge.

The oil with the lowest total of ranks is deemed the best oil of show. In the event of a tie, the oil with the greatest number of 1st rankings is deemed the winner. In the very unlikely event that two oils have the same number of first rankings, the ranks of tied oils provided by the head judges will be used to break the deadlock.

An exhibitor's booklet giving details of the FFA, the quality score awarded and a brief comment on each oil. Typically only award winners are identified by name.