



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE  
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



# Horticulture Skill-A-Thon Handbook 2026



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## Event Overview

The South Dakota 4-H Horticulture Skill-A-Thon is an opportunity for youth to demonstrate their knowledge of gardening practices and plant development, ability to identify plant specimens, and other horticulture related knowledge. The contest consists of three parts: judging, a written test, and plant identification. Study materials specific to the contest are available from South Dakota 4-H and the National Junior Horticulture Association.

## Event Date, Time, and Location

The event will be held on Friday of the South Dakota State Fair in the Nordby Exhibit Hall on the South Dakota State Fairgrounds, Huron, SD. The event will have pre-scheduled shift times, which contestants will select when registering for the event.

## Rules and Regulations

- Youth are limited to one entry for Horticulture Skill-A-Thon
- Individuals must be registered in FairEntry for the Horticulture Skill-A-Thon Contest by August 1st at 11:59 p.m. Registered individuals will select a time to participate in FairEntry. We reserve the right to adjust a participant's time frame, if needed.
- A reader will be available, but it is the responsibility of the youth or guardian to ask for assistance when they arrive at the Skill-A-Thon. Monitors will also be available to answer questions.
- The combined score of all sections is the participant's overall score and which determines placing.
- All age divisions have one or more plant identification classes.
- Contest participants are required to identify common plants from any of these parts: root, stem, flower or seed. Study Guides and Identification study help can be accessed at <https://www.njha.org/horticultural-id-and-judging-study-materials-2.html>
- Plant samples vary for each age division. Samples may be live or preserved and may include, but are not limited to: stems, twigs, leaves, flowers, seeds, fruits, roots, bulbs, tubers or plant products. Plant Samples may also come from printed materials.
- Awards will be given to top individuals.

The Horticulture Skill-a-thon consists of three parts; judging, written tests, and plant identification. See the Beginner, Junior, and Senior sections of this handbook for further details on what each age group is expected to study.

## Beginners

Beginners are youth ages 8-10 as of January 1 of the current 4-H year.

Beginners will judge one class of vegetables and one class of fruits. Specimens may be anything that is locally in season or readily available for purchase at the time of the contest. Youth participating in the Horticulture Skill-A-Thon should be familiar with how to place a class of 4 items prior to participating in the state contest.

Beginners will identify 10 vegetables. A list of 25 potential vegetables is provided to study from and to use at the time of the contest to aid in making their selection. Live specimen samples will be used whenever possible, but samples for identification could come from preserved or printed materials as well. Beginners will only identify edible portions of vegetables, which may be presented whole, sliced, or any other format commonly used when preparing said vegetable for consumption.

Beginners will take an exam with content based on the Beginner Study Guide, which can be obtained from the SDSU Extension website or your local Extension office. Exam questions will be in multiple choice, matching, and/or True/False format.

### Vegetable ID list for Beginners

Asparagus	Corn	Pepper
Basil	Cucumber	Potato (Irish)
Bean	Eggplant	Radish
Beet	Garlic	Rhubarb
Broccoli	Kale	Spinach
Brussels Sprouts	Lettuce	Tomato
Cabbage	Muskmelon	Watermelon
Carrot	Onion	
Cauliflower	Peas	

## Juniors

Juniors are youth ages 11-13 as of January 1 of the current 4-H year.

Juniors will judge one class of vegetables, one class of fruits, and one class of flowers/indoor plants. Specimens may be anything that is locally in season or readily available for purchase at the time of the contest. Youth participating in the Horticulture Skill-A-Thon should be familiar with how to place a class of 4 items prior to participating in the state contest.

Juniors will identify 10 vegetables, 10 fruits/nuts/berries, and 10 flowers/indoor plants. A list of 35 potential items for each category is provided to study from and to use at the time of the contest to aid in making their selection. Live specimen samples will be used whenever possible, but samples for identification could come from preserved or printed materials as well. Juniors will identify edible and/or seed portions of vegetables and fruits/nuts/berries. Juniors will identify flowers only for flowers/indoor plants.

Juniors will take an exam with content based on the Junior Study Guide, which can be obtained from the SDSU Extension website or your local Extension office, and 2 of the National Junior Horticulture Association (NJHA) study guides. Which NJHA study guides are used will change annually. Contact your local Extension Office for the current year's study guides. Exam questions will be in multiple choice, matching, and/or True/False format.

### Vegetable ID list for Juniors:

Artichoke (Globe/Jerusalem)	Cucumber	Pepper
Asparagus	Dill	Potato (Irish)
Basil	Edamame (Edible Soybean)	Potato (Sweet)
Bean	Eggplant	Radish
Beet	Garlic	Rhubarb
Broccoli	Kale	Spinach
Brussels Sprouts	Lettuce	Squash
Cabbage	Muskmelon	Thyme
Carrot	Okra	Tomatillo
Cauliflower	Onion	Tomato
Celery	Parsley	Watermelon
Corn	Peas	

### Fruits, Nuts, and Berries ID list for Juniors:

Almond	Coffee	Mulberry
Apple	Cranberry	Nectarine/Peach
Apricot	Date	Orange
Avocado	Elderberry	Pear
Banana	English Walnut	Pecan
Blackberry	Fig	Pineapple
Blueberry (Vaccinium sp.)	Gooseberry	Pistachio
Brazil Nut	Grape	Plum
Butternut	Grapefruit	Pomegranate
Cherry	Kiwi	Raspberry
Chestnut	Lemon	Strawberry
Coconut	Mango	

**Flowers and Indoor Plants ID for Juniors:**

African Violet	Daffodil	Marigold
Amaryllis	Dahlia	Pansy
Bachelor Button	Daylily	Peony
Begonia	Dracaena	Petunia
Canna	Geranium ( <i>Pelargonium</i> sp.)	Purple Coneflower ( <i>Echinacea</i> sp.)
Celosia	Gladiolus	Rose
Chrysanthemum	Hollyhock	Salvia
Coleus	Hosta	Schefflera
Columbine	Impatiens ( <i>I. walleriana</i> , <i>I. hawkeri</i> )	Sedum sp.
Coral Bells ( <i>Heuchera</i> sp.)	Iris	Snapdragon
Cosmos	Lily (Easter, Asiatic, Oriental)	Tulip
Crocus		Zinnia

## Seniors

Seniors are youth ages 14-18 as of January 1 of the current 4-H year.

Seniors will judge one class of vegetables, one class of fruits, and one class of flowers/indoor plants. Specimens may be anything that is locally in season or readily available for purchase at the time of the contest. Youth participating in the Horticulture Skill-A-Thon should be familiar with how to place a class of 4 items prior to participating in the state contest.

Seniors will identify 10 vegetables, 10 fruits/nuts/berries, 10 landscape ornamentals, and 10 flowers/indoor plants. A list of 30-45 potential items for each category is provided to study from and to use at the time of the contest to aid in making their selection. Live specimen samples will be used whenever possible, but samples for identification could come from preserved or printed materials as well. Seniors will identify edible, seed, and/or foliage portions of vegetables and fruits/nuts/berries. Seniors will identify foliage, flower, or seed portions for landscape ornamentals. Seniors will identify flower or foliage for flowers and indoor plants.

Seniors will take an exam with content based on the Senior Study Guide, which can be obtained from the SDSU Extension website or your local Extension office, and 2 of the National Junior Horticulture Association (NJHA) study guides. Which NJHA study guides are used will change annually. Contact your local Extension Office for the current year's study guides. Exam questions will be in multiple choice, matching, and/or True/False format.

### Vegetable ID list for Seniors:

Artichoke (Globe/Jerusalem)	Edamame (Edible Soybean)	Pepper
Asparagus	Eggplant	Potato (Irish)
Basil	Garlic	Potato (Sweet)
Bean	Horseradish	Radish
Beet	Kale	Rhubarb
Broccoli	Kohlrabi	Rosemary
Brussels Sprouts	Leek	Sage
Cabbage	Lettuce	Spinach
Carrot	Muskmelon	Squash
Cauliflower	Mustard	Swiss Chard
Celery	Okra	Thyme
Chives	Onion	Tomatillo
Corn	Parsley	Tomato
Cucumber	Parsnip	Turnip
Dill	Peas	Watermelon

**Fruits, Nuts, and Berries ID for Seniors:**

Almond	Currant	Mulberry
Apple	Date	Nectarine/Peach
Apricot	Elderberry	Olive
Avocado	English Walnut	Orange
Banana	Fig	Papaya
Blackberry	Filbert	Pear
Black Walnut	Gooseberry	Pecan
Blueberry ( <i>Vaccinium</i> sp.)	Grape	Persimmon
Brazil Nut	Grapefruit	Pineapple
Butternut	Guava	Pistachio
Cherry	Kiwi	Plum
Chestnut	Kumquat	Pomegranate
Coconut	Lemon	Raspberry
Coffee	Macadamia Nut	Shagbark Hickory
Cranberry	Mango	Strawberry

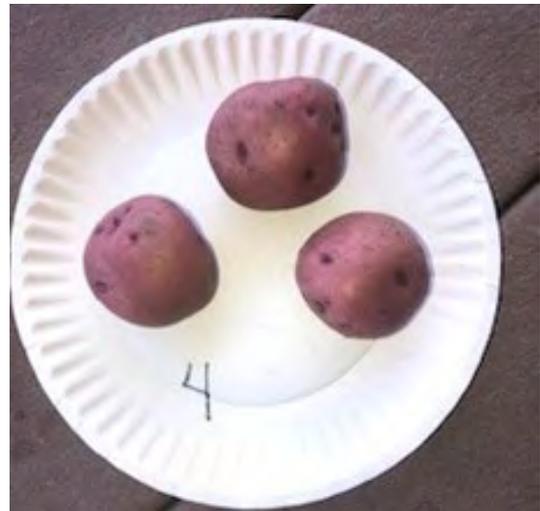
**Flowers and Indoor Plants ID for Seniors:**

African Violet	Daylily	Pansy
Ageratum	Dianthus sp.	Peony
Amaryllis	Dracaena	Peperomia
Bachelor Button	Dumbcane/Diffenbachia	Petunia
Begonia	Ficus sp.	Philodendron
Canna	Geranium ( <i>Pelargonium</i> sp.)	Purple Coneflower ( <i>Echinacea</i> sp.)
Celosia	Gladiolus	Rose
Chrysanthemum	Hollyhock	Salvia
Coleus	Hosta	Schefflera
Columbine	Hyacinth	Sedum sp.
Coral Bells ( <i>Heuchera</i> sp.)	Impatiens ( <i>I. walleriana</i> , <i>I. hawkeri</i> )	Snakeplant/Sansevieria
Cosmos	Iris	Snapdragon
Cranesbill ( <i>Geranium</i> sp.)	Lily (Easter, Asiatic, Oriental)	Tulip
Crocus	Marigold	Zinnia
Daffodil	Nasturtium	
Dahlia		

### Landscape Ornamentals ID for Seniors:

Arborvitae	Euonymus	Periwinkle (Vinca sp.)
Ash	Fir	Pine
Basswood/Linden (Tilia sp.)	Forsythia	Potentilla
Birch	Hibiscus sp.	Redbud (Cercis sp.)
Boxwood	Honey Locust	Spirea
Cedar (Cedrus sp.)	Hydrangea	Spruce
Cottonwood/Poplar	Juniper	Viburnum
Dogwood	Lilac	Willow
Elm	Maple	Wisteria
English Ivy	Oak	Yew (Taxus sp.)

Here is a sample judging class for practice. Youth must determine the order of these 4 samples from best to worst. For this particular class, consider the size, shape, and uniformity of the potatoes within their grouping.



Official placing: 2-4-3-1 with cuts 4-5-5

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