

Portfolio Competition 2024

A guide for photographers



What is the portfolio category about?

The Portfolio Competition offers all entrants a unique opportunity to have your photography judged for an RHS Medal.

It offers entrants the ability to submit a body of work based on a series of six images that have a cohesive theme within the spectrum of gardens, gardeners, wildlife in gardens and plants.

- All entries must include a hanging plan and a (maximum) 250-word statement describing the work.
- All entries are presented and assessed by the panel of portfolio judges.
- Shortlisted entrants are then invited to prepare their work in print (including mount) ready for hanging and exhibition at the prestigious RHS Botanical Art & Photography Show at Saatchi Gallery in June 2024.
- Portfolio exhibits are judged at the RHS Botanical Art & Photography Show against a set of RHS portfolio competition criteria.
- The RHS offers medal awards in Gold, Silver Gilt, Silver and Bronze.
- A 'Best Portfolio Photography exhibit' with a prize is awarded to the most outstanding exhibit. Additional awards for the portfolio competition to be announced prior to the commencement of the exhibition in June 2024.

What is the process for entering?

Entry to the RHS Portfolio Competition is free.

- Entries must contain six images of 4 -10MB in size and include a hanging plan, a written statement explaining the motivation behind the capture of the collection, the techniques used and any other relevant information.
- To submit your free entry, send your image files and other accompanying documentation (image transfer sites are available, such as WeTransfer / Dropbox) to photoportfolio@rhs.org.uk
- Entries must be submitted by the deadline of 10am (UK time) on 1 February 2024. Only one entry will be permitted per person.
- Shortlisted entrants are invited to exhibit at the RHS Botanical Art & Photography Show in June 2024. If shortlisted entrants are unable to submit their work for exhibition in the same competition year, they have the option to defer to the following year. However, the work will not be automatically selected for exhibit and will be subject to the same judging and selection processes as the entries shortlisted the following year.

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- Judging takes place at the RHS Botanical Art & Photography Show in June 2024 prior to the opening of the exhibition and considers all aspects of the entry against RHS Portfolio Competition criteria including how it is displayed.
- Medals are awarded and the 'Best Portfolio Photography exhibit' selected at the launch prior to the exhibition opening to the public.

Why should I enter?

Entering the Portfolio Competition brings a variety of benefits for professional and amateur photography enthusiasts alike. All submitted entries are carefully reviewed by the judging panel and feedback is provided on request, whether or not you are shortlisted.

If your work is shortlisted and selected for exhibition, it will be seen by visitors to the show including potential buyers and commissioners. This is an opportunity for exhibitors to sell and promote their work to a wider audience.

In addition, a selection of Portfolio entries and winners may also be eligible to see their work exhibited at RHS Gardens across the country with exposure to an even larger audience. The RHS is also committed to sharing the best images from Portfolio in The Garden magazine and on the RHS website bringing your work to an audience of over 600,000 RHS Members.

Portfolio rules and regulations

1. Image requirements

1.1 All photographs must be mainly of plants, flowers or gardens or some aspect of botany or horticulture, including fungi and lichens. Entries can include people working or interacting within a horticultural environment. Images which include other aspects of garden wildlife such as birds, mammals or invertebrates must ensure that they are balanced with sufficient plant content and that the wildlife content is not dominant.

1.2. Photographs that have been enhanced digitally will be permitted, but entrants must indicate where digital enhancements have been used in their initial submission statement and, if shortlisted, this information must be present on literature or interpretation to support their display.

1.3. All aspects of every submitted photograph must be the photographer's own work.

1.4. Black and white or colour photographs are accepted but not a mixture of both.

1.5. Judges will not favour any one photographic style over another. However, they will expect entrants to use their chosen techniques with awareness and sensitivity and to ensure that the techniques used are beneficial to understanding of the plant content.

1.6. Images which have been previously exhibited at an RHS Show are not permitted.

2. Series requirements

2.1. A minimum of six images in a series or on a distinct common theme. NOTE – the judges recommend six images only in most cases as, if selected for the exhibition, it is likely that only six images will be permitted due to restrictions on space.

2.2. The choice of subject is left to the photographer. This might be as general as 'Winter' or as specific as 'The genus Dahlia'.

2.3. There must be a stylistic integrity throughout the display.

3. Pre-selection for previous medal winners

3.1. Pre-selection is no longer available for previous winners of medals in RHS Portfolio.

3.2. All entrants, including past winners, must submit their entry for shortlisting by the deadline of 10am (UK time) on 1 February 2024.

3.3. Entrants who have deferred their selected Portfolio will be contacted to confirm whether they wish to exhibit in 2024. Such entries will be judged again and may or may not be selected for exhibition again.

4. Exhibition requirements

Shortlisted entrants will be invited to print and mount their work for exhibition at the RHS Botanical Art & Photography Show at Saatchi Gallery in June 2024 in order to be judged for an RHS Medal.

Entrants will be responsible for the cost of printing and mounting their work as well as getting it to the gallery. Framing and return of work will be covered by the RHS. Mount style and size will be specified by the gallery and details will be provided to selected photographers.

If selected for exhibition, all submitted images will need to be correctly identified and labelled with Latin names where relevant. Help is available with styling of names and identifications.

5. Judging, awards and prizes

5.1. The following Royal Horticultural Society medals are available for award:

- Gold
- Silver-Gilt
- Silver
- Bronze

5.2. A cash prize of £500, plus an RHS Gift Membership, is awarded to the Portfolio named Best Portfolio Exhibit

5.3. Photographs are judged as a complete display. If one or more images are of a lower standard within the series, the level of award will be affected.

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5.4. Entries are shortlisted anonymously with photographer's names only available to the judges at the final exhibition after judging has concluded.

5.5. Judges take into account the overall impression of a display, the botanical and horticultural content and photographic quality, including presentation details such as mounting, labelling and framing.

5.6. Gold medals are only awarded to exhibits of the highest standards. The judges adhere to strict guidelines and where necessary, decisions are reviewed by a Moderator to ensure consistency.

5.7. The decision of the judges is final.

5.8. Feedback is available on request after judging.

5.9. Medal cards will be placed on exhibits. Additional cards may be ordered from the RHS at the show. Each duplicate medal card costs £5.

Frequently asked questions

Is my photography good enough?

Portfolio is judged against a variety of criteria including the technical execution of the photography, the horticultural content of the images, how the portfolio is presented and how the portfolio hangs together as a whole. The only way to really know is to enter, it's free and you can request feedback to help improve – there is nothing to lose.

What is the timeline for Portfolio?

Portfolio entry opens in November 2023 and the deadline for entries is 10am on 1 February 2024. Shortlisted entrants who have been selected to exhibit their work will be contacted in February/March 2024 and judging will take place at the RHS Botanical Art & Photography Show in June 2024.

Isn't printing and hanging an exhibition expensive?

To minimise costs to the photographer, the RHS and Saatchi gallery will cover the costs of framing the work and returning it to you after the show. The costs to the photographer are therefore limited to printing and card window mounting (also called matte) the work.

Who are the judges?

Portfolio is judged by members of the RHS Portfolio Judging Panel. Panel members come from a wide range of backgrounds, some are professional plant and garden photographers. Others are photographers working in other fields. Some have their background in plantsman-ship or gardening, but all have a keen interest in photographic art and plants. Judges are selected each year and they do change year on year depending on their availability.

