Virginia FFA: Student Container Garden Competition

State Fair of Virginia

2026 Contest Letter

State Fair Address: Meadow Event Park 13111 Dawn Blvd Doswell, VA 23047 Caroline County	**Contest Registration and Tickets:** Tickets are not required for the set up days. A small number of daily tickets will be distributed to teachers so that you can care for your displays during the fair. Additional Tickets: Agricultural Education instructors are responsible for ordering tickets: https://www.vaffa.org/state-fair-of-virginia	**Event Location:** Courtyard Area at Harvest Landing	**Times:** *Installation:* Wednesday or Thursday, September 23 or 24 (8:00 AM - 7:00 PM) *Judging:* Friday, September 25 @ 10:00 AM *Take Down:* Monday, October 5 (8:00 AM - 7:00 PM). Planters stay with the State Fair of Virginia.
2026 Theme: "America in Bloom: Celebrating 250 Years"	**Entry Deadline:** First Come, First Serve (10 containers) by September 15th. A waiting list will be maintained for schools who wish to be added.	**Questions? Contact us!** *Virginia FFA Association* Andy Seibel - gseibel@vt.edu Sarah Jo Jones - sarahjo@vt.edu 540-231-3823	

Purpose:

The Student Container Garden competition encourages students to work collaboratively to effectively design, plan, and install an attractive container garden display that promotes agriculture. The container gardens are scored based on design concept, function, and execution.

Rules and Guidelines:

1. The container gardens shall be educational as well as artistic.
2. Design and installation of these container gardens shall reflect the work of the students as assisted by the instructor and sponsors as appropriate, through the classroom program.
3. The container garden designs will be based on the theme "America in Bloom: Celebrating 250 Years".
4. Plant materials selected should be a combination of annuals and perennials. All plant materials should be labeled and should include explanations if needed. The school is responsible for providing their own media. This signage should be readable by the public from outside the design space.
5. Each school is responsible for providing a laminated or weather-proof sign for their container garden that includes the school name, sponsors/donors, explanation of design, participating student names,

and a title for the container garden. Signs should be built into the display and will be covered during judging for a blind scoring process.
6. Lights, pumps, foundations should remain in good working order. Watering equipment will be available, but schools are still responsible for care of their container garden.
7. Designs must be confined to the container, but the container surface can be decorated as long as it is not permanent (no permanent paint or hardware).
8. Awards will be withheld if the container garden plot is not cleaned after the fair.
9. Each school will be given 1 season pass and 1 parking pass to be used for checking on the container garden during the fair.
10. Power will not be available, so plan accordingly for lights or pumps.

Exhibition Container Garden Specs:
Containers will be located in the courtyard area of Harvest Landing. Each container is 34” square and 24” deep. Media is NOT provided. Schools are responsible for their grow media.

Judging/Scoring Criteria:
Judges will be selected to combine expertise in design and horticulture education. The evaluation perspective will emphasize demonstration of commercial design quality by high school students based on the following criteria:

Design Concept: Reflects a creative and imaginative interpretation of the theme. Demonstrates understanding and application of design principles (focus, proportion, scale, color harmony, rhythm, unity).

Plant Selection & Compatibility: Combination of annuals and perennials that are healthy, appropriate for container growing, and environmentally compatible. Shows thoughtful planning regarding light, water, and space needs.

Educational Value and Labeling: Accurate and readable plant labels, as well as interpretive signage that explains the connection to the theme and the pollinators featured. Public-facing educational value is clear and inviting.

Design Execution & Craftsmanship: Neatness and polish of installation. Plantings appear established. All items are secure and arranged purposefully. Attention to finishing details like media coverage and clean edges.

Awards:
Cash Awards:
1st Place - $100
2nd Place - $75
3rd Place - $65
4th Place - $60
5th-10th - $50

Ribbons:
1st-10th Place

State Fair Scholarship Program:

Scholarship funds will be divided equally between the participating students representing the winning garden. Please see the State Fair website, www.statefairva.org for more information regarding the scholarship program.

1st Place - $600
2nd Place - $400
3rd Place - $300
4th Place - $200

Event Sponsor:

Attached - Event Rubric

State Fair: Student Container Garden
Scoring Rubric

Judge: _____ **Container #: _____**

Scoring Category	Scoring Criteria	High Points 10-8	Middle Points 7-4	Low Points 3-0	Score
Design Concept	*Relates to the theme*	Reflects a creative and imaginative interpretation of the theme	Clear interpretation of the theme	Theme is not represented in the design	
	Elements of Design - focus, proportion, scale, color harmony, rhythm, and unity	Demonstrates understanding and application of design principles.	Includes some elements of design.	Little to no evidence of elements of design.	
Plant Selection & Compatibility	*Compatibility and selection*	Combination of annuals and perennials that are healthy, appropriate for container growing, and environmentally compatible.	Plant selection has some incompatible elements, but mostly works with the environment and in a container.	Plant selection shows little compatibility or is not suitable for a container garden.	
	Environmental factors considered	Shows thoughtful planning regarding light, water, and space needs.	Plant selection lacks attention to planning for environmental factors.	Plant selection shows little to no attention to planning for environmental factors.	
Accessories & Non- Plant Elements	*Use of decorative, educational, or thematic elements*	Accessories enhance the design and are appropriate scale, materials, and are not permanent.	Accessories somewhat enhance the design, may not be to scale, or materials may not be appropriate to the setting.	Accessories do not enhance, are out of scale, or inappropriate materials for the setting.	
Educational Value & Signage	*Educational value is clear and visible*	Accurate and readable plant labels, as well as signage that connects the theme are visible and attractive.	Signage lacks educational value or visibility.	Signage is missing, adds no educational value, or is not visible.	
Design Execution & Craftsmanship	*Neatness and polish of installation.*	Plantings appear established. All items are secure and arranged purposefully. Attention given to finishing details.	Plantings do not appear as well established, secure, or lack purposeful arrangement. Lacks attention to detail.	Plantings are not secure or purposefully arranged. The design is not polished.	
				Total	**____/70**