

A Guide to a Good Harvest

CONSIDER A PLANT-BASED APPROACH TO THE SPORT OF DOGS

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We are undoubtedly living in a time when many expect instant success and gratification. In today's society, many people do not know or understand that hard work, dedication, and patience are keys to success in whatever one attempts. Often, history and nature can provide us with great insight into a pathway towards achieving our goals and dreams.

Many exhibitors fail to follow a proven pathway to success not only in our society but also in our sport of dogs and all that it offers. Today, Exhibitors, Breeders, and Judges rush to advance and succeed in the show ring, performance events, and whelping box, and in the advancement of their judging careers. People look at the achievements of others and, without much thought, feel they should be at the same level as those who put in many years of effort to achieve their various levels of success.

The old expression, "Rome wasn't built in a day," is a good starting point for many of us to understand that there is more to the equation than just showing up and expecting immediate results.

If you will indulge me, I would like to use the bamboo plant as an example of how learning from nature can help to put this into perspective.

Bamboos are part of a subfamily of diverse, primarily evergreen flowering plants. There are numerous variations of bamboo, and after the sprouts appear they are among the fastest-growing plants in the world. Certain species grow at a rate of 36 inches within 24 hours, or about 1-1/2 inches every hour. The giant bamboo is the most prominent member of the grass family and can reach a length of over 150 feet, 14 inches in diameter, and weigh over 1,000 lbs.

Bamboo is a very versatile plant. It is used as a food source and to produce raw materials and building materials. With only this information, one would think this is an excellent plant with a very high rate of successful production; however, if you were to assume that, you would be wrong. To understand how those exceptional growth rates are achieved, you must know "the rest of the story."

To simplify the process, you must understand that achieving success in bamboo growing requires planning, patience, nurturing, raising, and harvesting.

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Planning: To farm the bamboo plant, you must know the various terrains, soils, and climates where it will grow.

Patience: After planting the bogs, as they are called, it will take anywhere from THREE TO SEVEN YEARS before the stalks take off at their rapid growth rate.

Nurturing: Once planted for 3 to 7 years, the plants must be kept moist, cultivated, and watched closely so that they will eventually sprout and bear the product.

Raising: Think about going anywhere from 3 to 7 years before seeing the sprouts start.

Harvesting: The joy and sense of achievement of seeing a payoff from a successful crop make all the effort and care worth it.

Now let's put this information in contrast to our sport.

Planning: How many of today's exhibitors, breeders, and judges have ever developed a plan, knowing it might take many years to reach those goals?

Patience: After developing a plan, how many people are willing to wait, however long it will take, to achieve those goals without complaining about the time, work, expense, and effort required to achieve them?

Nurturing: We all need to cultivate and enrich our minds and expertise, and understand our abilities or lack thereof to achieve them.

Raising: To succeed in all avenues of our sport, we must continue to increase our goals and expectations, and put in the time and effort to enhance our personal growth and endeavors.

Harvesting: If we can honestly say that we have done everything and put in the time and effort, I am confident that most people will reach their goals.

In our sport, exhibitors have the ability to learn and master whatever element of competition they participate in. They can attend various training classes, join local clubs, and receive mentoring from the more experienced to assist them. Most people want everyone to succeed. The more that people succeed, the more involved they become, enabling our sport to grow. Unfortunately, many people lack the patience and perseverance to work at improving their skills.

While many today complain that they can't compete with the "professionals," nothing is further from the truth. Any exhibitor with a high-quality representative of its breed actually has an advantage because they can devote more time to developing as a team with their dogs. However, the key is that you must have a quality specimen and know how to present it in the best possible way.

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Today's breeders have so much information and technology at their fingertips. The serious breeder knows that proper research, health testing, pedigree research, and honest evaluation of the animals in a breeding program are essential to developing a successful line of dogs which you will continue to improve upon.

Our breeders are the backbone of our sport. They strive to improve our breeds and they know the heartache that comes with the process when things go wrong. They deserve recognition for their effort, especially when they provide healthy, happy, and temperamentally sound puppies to the general public. While backyard breeders, puppy mills, and AR groups seek to destroy us, it is the reputable breeder who continues to promote our love and efforts on behalf of purebred dogs.

Those of us who have been judging for a significant amount of time are always amazed at how newer judges are in a big hurry to acquire more Breeds and Groups as fast as possible. A simple piece of advice is to take it slow. Develop a good reputation and proficiency for the breeds you have before advancing. Exhibitors are not stupid; they know if you have a grasp on their breed. Continue to consult your mentors, and never stop learning. It is essential to learn about other breeds, even if you do not currently judge them. Knowledge is power, especially when doing Groups or judging Best in Show.

It does not matter which aspect of our sport you partake in—Conformation, Obedience, Agility, Field Trials, and other performance events. Think about the long process that a bamboo plant goes through, and keep in perspective that to achieve greatness, it takes planning, patience, nurturing, raising, harvesting—and perseverance, and if you do these things you will bear a fruitful harvest. ■