

# The Paul Thomas Pi Alpha Xi Digital Photo Contest

Sponsored by  
Pi Alpha Xi, National Honor Society for Horticulture

Contest Submissions begin April 15, 2026 until July 15, 2026

Note: Entries are taken on-line only



**PURPOSE:** Pi Alpha Xi (PAX) established a photography contest in 1996 to be held annually in conjunction with the Annual Conference of the American Society for Horticultural Science. The purpose of the contest is to promote PAX to ASHS membership, to support PAX's scholarship program, and to encourage horticulture-related photography. Contestants need not be members of PAX to participate. This year's competition will take place between April 15, 2026 and July 15, 2026 with judging to be complete prior to the ASHS 2026 Annual Conference. All horticulture-related subjects and commodities are welcome, including fruits, vegetables, flowers, all plant habits, landscapes, production situations, and traditional horticultural settings.

Entries must be submitted online between April 15, 2026 and July 15, 2026.

***Payment of entry fee is required before uploading any submission. Final fee payment date is July 15, 2026 at 5 PM Eastern.***

Questions may be directed to: Dr. Sonja Maki, Plant and Earth Science Department, 324 Agricultural Science Building, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, 410 S. Third Street, River Falls, WI 54022. Phone: 715-425-4292, email: [sonja.maki@uwrf.edu](mailto:sonja.maki@uwrf.edu)

## ENTRY FEE:

The entry fee is \$15 (USD) per image. Payment of entry fee is required before uploading any submission. You can enter up to two (2) images for each category – (maximum 16 images in total). To enter, either enter while registering for the conference, or please follow this link:

<https://ashs.org/page/PiAlphaXiPhotoContestOnlineEntryForm>

## ENTRY CATEGORIES

Images that include people must include a model release form that may be found at:

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/ashs.org/resource/resmgr/pax/2021\\_photo\\_contest\\_model\\_rel.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/ashs.org/resource/resmgr/pax/2021_photo_contest_model_rel.pdf)

1. **Perfect Partners** – These images represent what the photographer believes to be outstanding plant combinations. These can be container, bed or floral design compositions. The images should show clearly how the two plant partners are being used, landscape settings, etc.
2. **Pi Alpha Xi 100th Anniversary** - Images that exemplify the mission of Pi Alpha Xi: to promote scholarship, fellowship, professional leadership, and the enrichment of human life through plants. Photos of PAX Plant sales, research, field days, group activities, teaching, etc. would be appropriate.
3. **Garden Visitors** – These images should include gardens, landscapes or plants sharing their space with people or insects. Examples include insects and pollinators, people or pets, or wildlife in the garden.
4. **Flowering Plants with An Attitude!** – We've all seen pansies growing out of sidewalk cracks, or native flowers growing on rock surfaces. This category is for any horticultural plant growing in an audacious,

amazing or inconceivable way. Examples include extremely large plant specimens, huge colonies or a lone survivor clinging to life in some inhospitable place.

5. **Serendipity** – Sometimes the perfect photograph is by chance. This category is for that random shot that was unplanned but exemplifies horticulture.
6. **Horticulture in Production** – These images in this category represent the core of academic horticulture in action. These images can be from farms, greenhouses, or research plots such as might be used in classroom or extension presentations.
7. **Photomicrography** – Many horticulturists spend hours over a microscope. Here is an opportunity to capture the small world. Photomicrographs must be taken using a light microscope, including fluorescence microscopy. Examples include plant structural details in whole or sectioned material, plant surfaces, pollination or plant interactions with the biotic environment. Electron microscopes that do not capture imagery using optical light technology are not permitted.
8. **Altered Images** – Photographs manipulated for artistic purposes by applying digital and/or traditional special effects (i.e., stacking, colorizing, toning, collage, photo composites, HDR, etc.). Please provide a brief description of the steps used to create the image for others to learn new techniques.

All participants are welcome to review “Creating a Better Image: An Introduction to Selected Rules of Composition.” <https://ashs.org/general/custom.asp?page=CreatingBetterImage>

#### **RULES:**

- To be eligible for any category, a photograph may have been shot by the entrant at any time, but the date of the shoot must be included.
- All entries must have a TITLE and CAPTION.
- No identifying or distracting artifacts (copyright symbols, dates, etc.) may be visible on images.
- Images must be in JPG, Tiff or PNG format. In the interest of judging fair comparisons, it is recommended that photos have a minimum resolution of 1024 x 768 and not exceed 2056 x 1532.
- Images processed using HDR, or significantly altered images where filters and special effects using software such as Photoshop and Lightroom, including stacking, will not be accepted except for those entered in the Altered Images category. The photographer may adjust contrast, crop a larger image and/or adjust horizon, or other adjustments, which do not change the basic integrity of the image. If the judges determine that a photographer has significantly altered his or her photo, they reserve the right to move the photo to Altered Images or to disqualify it.
- Photographers will retain original copyrights to their photos but grant PAX and ASHS the right to make use of their entries in advertising, promotional and fund-raising materials, publications of the societies, etc., without monetary compensation. Photographer credits will accompany each use.
- Entrants must be 18 years old or older.

#### **RIGHTS AND APPROVALS:**

- PAX reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to disqualify and remove any entry that does not comply with the requirements set forth by PAX.
- You are solely responsible for the protection of both your photography and the confidential information that you may provide during registration (i.e. username and password). PAX will not be held liable for any resulting damages related to a breach or theft of this personal information or work.
- You must have obtained proper permission to photograph any subjects portrayed in your entries, and you accept all responsibility and liability for such authorization or permission.

- For a photo in which a person is recognizable, you must secure a model release from the subject or, in the case of a minor, the subject's parent or guardian and provide it to PAX upon request. The form can be found at this link:  
[https://cdn.ymaws.com/ashs.org/resource/resmgr/pax/2021\\_photo\\_contest\\_model\\_rel.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/ashs.org/resource/resmgr/pax/2021_photo_contest_model_rel.pdf)
- Your entries must not infringe upon any person's privacy rights.
- In the event of a category receiving low quality or insufficient submissions necessary for an appropriate comparison, the judges have the right to not make an award for that category.
- The decisions of the judges are final.
- All terms and conditions subject to change without notice and at the sole discretion of PAX

#### JUDGING:

There will be a minimum of four (4) judges who will blind-judge all entries, which will be randomized prior to their review. Judges will score the photographs according to the following criteria:

- **Focus (0-10 pts)** Attention to focus, background and depth of field will be considered as determined by the subject / situation captured. Evidence of camera-based (mechanical) abilities and/or lighting manipulation skills to create the image.
- **Image Composition (0-30 pts)** Assessment of the “wow factor” or exceptional visual qualities, or unusual subject/situation.
- **Theme (0-20 pts)** Assessment of the level of success of the photographer achieved in interpreting the stated intent of the photographic category.
- **Artistic Effort (0-40 pts)** Evidence of creativity, composition, and visually appealing image creation from camera-based images that are not significantly manipulated using image software.

#### AWARDS IN EACH CATEGORY:

<b>Summa Cum Laude</b> (First Place)	\$20
<b>Magna Cum Laude</b> (Second Place)	\$10
<b>Cum Laude</b> (Third Place):	\$ 5
<b>Best of Show:</b>	\$25 – awarded at the judges’ discretion to one or more photos that exhibit outstanding, unique, and/or special qualities.

*There will be no ties for the Summa Cum Laude Awards and all winners will be announced at the American Society for Horticultural Science's (ASHS) annual conference and online afterwards.*