

Latin for Plant People

A starter course in the history, practice, vocabulary, and issues of plant taxonomy

- Learn why we use the Latin binomial naming system for plants
- Apply the foundations of plant taxonomy by creating your own plant label
- Practice identifying Latin names with the physical features they describe
- Get informed and share your opinion on issues in plant taxonomy

Estimated time: one hour



Created by L. Ellison

History of Plant Taxonomy



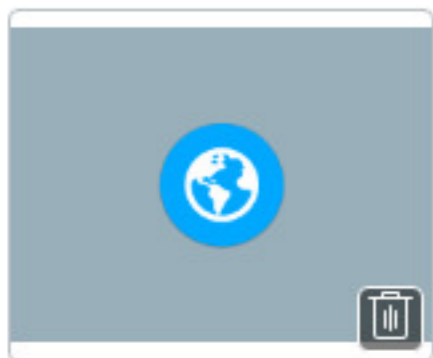
About Plant Taxonomy

Listen to botanist and author James Wong tell the hosts of the Gardening with RHS podcast about the benefits of scientific names, including pronunciation, specificity, and clues to plant through Latin names (appearance, relations, performance, etc.); scientific names as erasure of indigenous people. (5m 30s)



Draw It

The New York Botanic Garden and many others use a standard format for their plant labels. Read more about their plant labels (click the small screen on the left!), and use what's below as a template to label your own plant labels.



As you record plants, you will develop your own system using the information that is available, or that you find most useful or interesting. For instance, including a houseplant's native range can be useful in determining its optimal growing conditions. Some people add plant drawings to their labels.

Customs in Writing Botanical Names

The botanical name is made of the **capitalized genus name**, then the **species name in lower-case letters**, as in *Gelsemium sempervirens*.

Finding Botanical Names

Instructions

Name

Other



Submit

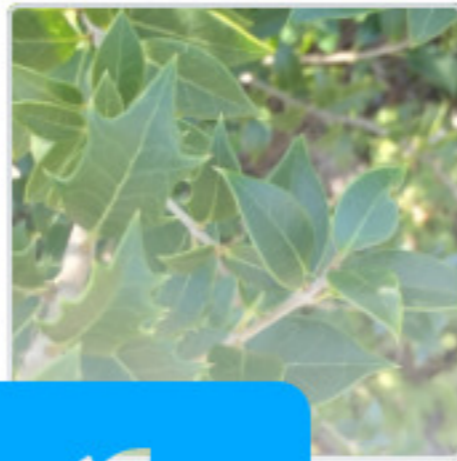
Latin Basics for Plant Taxonomy

Listen to my observations from an afternoon at the Pitt County Arboretum where I used my knowledge of Latin to enhance my appreciation of the garden specimens. For a guide to botanical Latin terms, check out this [online botanical dictionary](#).



Salvia microphylla

Osymanthus heterophyllus



Lycoris radiata

Lespedeza bicolor

Viburnum plicatum



Acer rubrum



Matching Pairs

Issues in Plant Taxonomy

- On Linnaeus and the origins of scientific racism
linnean.org/learning/who-was-linnaeus/linnaeus-and-race
- Native Plants, Racism, and the Colonizing Language of Gardening
monarchgard.com/thedeepmiddle/native-plants-racism-the-colonizing-nature-of-garden-language
- The Shifting Science of Botanical Nomenclature
nybg.org/blogs/plant-talk/2013/06/science/the-shifting-science-of-botanical-nomenclature-i/



Share your Opinion

Share your thoughts on one of the issues related to plant taxonomy on the previous page, or post a new issue for others to consider. You can type, record yourself or just your voice, or communicate through imagery with photos or gifs.

^ Instructions



Collaborate Board

Share your Opinion

Media Credits

- All photos and Latin Basics audio by Lisa Ellison
- History of Plant Taxonomy video: Linnean Society. (2018, January 2). Carl Linnaeus's Systema Naturae [Video]. YouTube.
<https://youtu.be/kVD6PP61A28?si=KMgaTk2vYrrqZipc>
- About Plant Taxonomy audio: Richards, G. & Davison, F. (Hosts). (2022, March 3). What's in a Name? (No. 302) [Audio podcast episode]. In Gardening with the RHS. RHS.
<https://podfollow.com/rhs-gardening/episode/d4aae4c33fabf6a7152d76be926a1e8507179054/view>



Resources for Further Study



- North Carolina Botanical Garden's Resources for Gardeners
<https://ncbg.unc.edu/plants/resources-for-gardeners/>
- Botanical Art & Artists: Plants: Names, Terms & Botanical Latin.
Includes many good book recommendations
<https://www.botanicalartandartists.com/plant-names-and-botanical-latin.html>
- Botanical Art & Artists Dictionary & Glossaries
<https://www.botanicalartandartists.com/botanical-dictionaries.html>
- NC Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox, with many pictures of plants and some audio <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/>
- For fun, here are some creative plant markers you can make
<https://jackfrostgardens.com/diy-your-own-plant-markers/>

Bonus Content on Botanical Art



Feeling inspired by the Kew Gardens lead researcher? Start creating your own botanical drawings with this advice from botanical artist Rosemary Wise: [Drawing Plants: 10 Points to Botanical Illustration](#)