

Plant Naming

The plants kingdom, *Plantae*, includes trees, herbs, bushes, grasses, vines, ferns, mosses, and green algae. The scientific study of plants, known as botany, has identified about 350,000 extant species of plants. Over 80,000 plants are in use throughout the world for their therapeutic properties. The method of naming plants as well as other living things using “Latinized” names was introduced to end the confusions of common names, which can refer to different plants depending on the region where they grow. Although plants had Latin names from early times, a systematic system was first applied to plants in 1753 by a Swede, Carl von Linné, who adopted a Latin name for himself—Linnaeus. Plant names are usually descriptive, from the features of a plant (*parvifolia*—small-leaved, e.g., *Ulmus parvifolia*), who first discovered it (L.—Linnaeus), or its country of origin (*palaestinum*—Palestine, e.g., *Arum palaestinum*). Since the names are not always based in Latin, it is probably more accurate to describe it as the botanical, scientific, or approved name, although it is usually written in a Latin form. The “International Code of Botanical Nomenclature” is an agreement between botanists around the world to follow the Binomial System of naming which gives the Genera and Species of the plant. The International Congress of Nomenclature is the committee that meets every 4 years to decide on any additions or changes to the naming of organisms.

The plant is first classified according to some physical characteristics, usually leaves, flowers, and fruits. This arrangement and classification of organisms is called taxonomy.

- The name is in two parts (Binomial System), first the Genus starting with a capital letter followed by the Species, with the first letter in lower case, for example, *Nigella sativa*—common name Black seed.
- The Genus name is often shortened to a capital letter, if it has already been used and another Species in that Genus is referred to, for example, *S. aucuparia*—Mountain Ash.
- The Species may be further divided into Subspecies (subsp. or ssp.), for example, *Euphorbia characias* subsp. *wulfenii*.

- Due to geographical and ecological differences, variations arise within a Species giving rise to a Variety name (var.). A Variety is usually Latinized, written in italics and the abbreviation var. is sometimes included, for example, *Geranium sanguinum* var. *striatum*.
- When this variation is due to selective breeding, it is called a Cultivar (cv.). A Cultivar name is not usually Latinized and is printed in standard type, but with a capital letter, and it is placed in single inverted commas, for example, *Geranium cinereum* ‘Ballerina’. Often the Species name is left out and the Genus is followed by the Cultivar name, for example, *Cotoneaster* ‘Autumn Fire’.
- Where the hybridization is between two Genera—a rare occurrence—the cross is placed at the beginning of the name, for example, ×*Fatsyhedera lizei*—between a false castor oil plant (Genus *Fatsia*) and an ivy (Genus *Hedera*).
- Despite all the care taken to give one name to each plant, some have more than one acceptable name. This usually occurs when a plant is reclassified due to more up-to-date methods of identification and the old name remains in use. In this case, the other name or synonym (syn.), is sometimes included on the label, for example, *Verbena bonariensis* syn. *V. patagonica*.

The lists below give some of the most commonly used names and their meanings. Knowing the origin of the name associates the meaning with the plant, so it is easier to remember those long names if you find out something about the plants. The Species in different Genera can have the same name so a culinary or medicinal herb can be called *officinale/is*, for example, *Fumaria officinalis* (Fumitory), *Melissa officinalis* (Lemon balm), *Rosmarinus officinalis* (Rosemary), *Salvia officinalis* (Sage), and *Zingiber officinale* (Ginger).

Species Names Describing Habitat: Names may end with (*um*), (*is*), or (*us*)

<i>arvensis</i>	Fields or cultivated land, e.g., <i>Sinapis arvensis</i>
<i>littoralis</i>	Of sea shores, e.g., <i>Griselinia littoralis</i>
<i>montana</i>	Of mountains, e.g., <i>Hosta montana</i>
<i>palustre</i>	Of swamps or marshes, e.g., <i>Ledum palustre</i>
<i>rivulare</i>	Of streams or rivers, e.g., <i>Ambystoma rivulare</i>
<i>sylvatica</i>	Of woods, e.g., <i>Geranium sylvaticum</i>

Species Names Describing Foliage: Names may end with (*um*) or (*us*)

<i>arguta</i>	Sharp, e.g., <i>Actinidia arguta</i>
<i>coriacea</i>	Leathery, e.g., <i>Holboellia coriacea</i>
<i>cordata</i>	Heart-shaped, e.g., <i>Alnus cordata</i>
<i>crassifolia</i>	Thick-leaved, e.g., <i>Ulmus crassifolia</i>
<i>crenata</i>	Shallow, rounded teeth, e.g., <i>Hyptis crenata</i>
<i>decidua</i>	Dropping its leaves, e.g., <i>Larix decidua</i>

<i>dentata</i>	Toothed, e.g., <i>Ligularia dentata</i>
<i>glabra</i>	Without hairs, e.g., <i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>
<i>glutinosa</i>	Sticky, e.g., <i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
<i>heterophylla</i>	Variable-leaved, e.g., <i>Tsuga heterophylla</i>
<i>hirsuta</i>	Hairy, e.g., <i>Cardamine hirsuta</i>
<i>incana</i>	Gray-downy, e.g., <i>Alnus incana</i>
<i>integerrima</i>	Without teeth, e.g., <i>Jatropha integerrima</i>
<i>laevigata</i>	Smooth and polished, e.g., <i>Rosa laevigata</i>
<i>lanceolata</i>	Lance-shaped, e.g., <i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i>
<i>latifolia</i>	Broad-leaved, e.g., <i>Dalbergia latifolia</i>
<i>macrophylla</i>	Large-leaved, e.g., <i>Flemingia macrophylla</i>
<i>maculata</i>	Spotted, blotched, e.g., <i>Neotinea maculata</i>
<i>marginata</i>	Margined, e.g., <i>Primula marginata</i>
<i>microphylla</i>	Small-leaved, e.g., <i>Salvia microphylla</i>
<i>molle</i>	Soft, e.g., <i>Alchemilla mollis</i>
<i>nitida</i>	Shining, e.g., <i>Lonicera nitida</i>
<i>ovata</i>	Egg-shaped, e.g., <i>Plantago ovata</i>
<i>palmata</i>	Hand-shaped, e.g., <i>Acer palmatum</i>
<i>parvifolia</i>	Small-leaved, e.g., <i>Ulmus parvifolia</i>
<i>platyphylla</i>	Broad-leaved, e.g., <i>Betula platyphylla</i>
<i>reticulata</i>	Net-veined, <i>Annona reticulata</i>
<i>rotundifolia</i>	Round-leaved, e.g., <i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>
<i>sempervirens</i>	Evergreen, e.g., <i>Cupressus sempervirens</i>
<i>serrata</i>	Saw-toothed, e.g., <i>Boswellia serrata</i>
<i>tomentosa</i>	Covered with short dense hairs, e.g., <i>Achillea tomentosa</i>
<i>variegata</i>	Variegated, two-colored, e.g., <i>Bauhinia variegata</i>

Species Names Describing Flowers: Names may end with (*um*) or (*us*)

<i>grandiflora</i>	Large-flowered, e.g., <i>Fragaria grandiflora</i>
<i>macropetala</i>	Many petalled, e.g., <i>Acmadenia macropetala</i>
<i>paniculata</i>	Panicle-shaped flower clusters, e.g., <i>Saxifraga paniculata</i>
<i>parviflora</i>	Small-flowered, e.g., <i>Aesculus parviflora</i>
<i>pauciflora</i>	Few flowers, e.g., <i>Eucalyptus pauciflora</i>
<i>polyantha</i>	Many flowered, e.g., <i>Allamanda polyantha</i>
<i>spicata</i>	Flowers in spikes, e.g., <i>Liatris spicata</i>
<i>stellata</i>	Starry flowers, e.g., <i>Magnolia stellata</i>
<i>umbellata</i>	Umbel-shaped flower clusters, e.g., <i>Chimaphila umbellata</i>
<i>alba(um)(us)</i>	For example, <i>Salix alba</i> , <i>Lawsonia alba</i>
<i>argentea</i>	Silvery, e.g., <i>Paronychia argentea</i>
<i>aurantiaca</i>	Orange, e.g., <i>Pilosella aurantiaca</i>
<i>aurea</i>	Golden, e.g., <i>Matricaria aurea</i>

<i>bicolor</i>	Two colored, e.g., <i>Fascicularia bicolor</i>
<i>caerulea</i>	Blue, e.g., <i>Passiflora caerulea</i>
<i>cinerea</i>	Ash gray, <i>Salix cinerea</i>
<i>coccinea</i>	Scarlet, e.g., <i>Schizostylis coccinea</i>
<i>ferruginea</i>	Rusty brown, e.g., <i>Prumnopitys ferruginea</i>
<i>glauca</i>	Sea-green, e.g., <i>Festuca glauca</i>
<i>lactea</i>	Milk white, e.g., <i>Euphorbia lactea</i>
<i>lilacina</i>	Lilac, e.g., <i>Pinguicula lilacina</i>
<i>lutea</i>	Yellow, e.g., <i>Asphodeline lutea</i>
<i>nigra</i>	Black, e.g., <i>Morus nigra</i>
<i>purpurea</i>	Purple, e.g., <i>Digitalis purpurea</i>
<i>rosea</i>	Rose pink, <i>Althaea rosea</i>
<i>rubra</i>	Red, e.g., <i>Filipendula rubra</i>
<i>sanguinea</i>	Blood red, e.g., <i>Geranium sanguineum</i>
<i>variegata</i>	Variegated, two-colored, e.g., <i>Bauhinia variegata</i>
<i>violacea</i>	Violet, e.g., <i>Ipomoea violacea</i>

Miscellaneous Species Names: Names may end with (*um*), (*us*), or (*is*)

<i>amoena</i>	Charming, pleasant, e.g., <i>Dieffenbachia amoena</i>
<i>commune</i>	Common, e.g., <i>Myrtus communis</i>
<i>confusa</i>	Confused identity, e.g., <i>Acacia confusa</i>
<i>formosa</i>	Beautiful, e.g., <i>Leycesteria formosa</i>
<i>hybrida</i>	Hybrid, e.g., <i>Vicia hybrida</i>
<i>insigne</i>	Outstanding, e.g., <i>Paphiopedilum insigne</i>
<i>intermedia</i>	Intermediate, e.g., <i>Leonotis intermedia</i>
<i>macrorrhiza</i>	With a large root, e.g., <i>Geranium macrorrhizum</i>
<i>media</i>	Midway between, e.g., <i>Stellaria media</i>
<i>officinale</i>	Used as a herb, e.g., <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>
<i>praecox</i>	Early, e.g., <i>Erophila praecox</i>
<i>pulchella</i>	Beautiful, e.g., <i>Gaillardia pulchella</i>
<i>sativa</i>	Cultivated, e.g., <i>Nigella sativa</i>
<i>speciosa</i>	Showy, e.g., <i>Tropaeolum speciosum</i>
<i>squamata</i>	Flaking, e.g., <i>Artemisia squamata</i>
<i>tinctoria</i>	Used in dying, e.g., <i>Anthemis tinctoria</i>
<i>tuberosa</i>	Tuber rooted, e.g., <i>Turincia tuberosa</i>
<i>vulgare(is)</i>	Common, e.g., <i>Sorghum vulgare</i>
