

## Latin Names, Common Names, Confusion, Oh My By Beth Turlington

Walking into a nursery and saying you want a rose bush is like walking into an automobile dealership and saying you want a car. You have to be more specific than that.

With plants, that can be a little complicated. Most of us use common names and common names can vary widely from region to region and can be totally different plants. You also can also run into Trademarked or Registered Trademark names from growers, which throws another wrench in the works. An example is Lo & Behold® 'Blue Chip' butterfly fly bush. The scientific name for this plant is *Buddleia*. One of the things I do if I find a plant I really like in one of the magazines I subscribe to is to cut it out, picture and all and take that with me to the nursery, it save a lot of confusion that way.

By having the Latin name of the plant you want, you get the plant you want, not an Edsel. Binomial Nomenclature, two-part names, is the system created by Dr. Carl Linnaeus around 1750. The first name will be the *Genus*, a group of one or more plants with similar characteristics. The second will be the *Species*. Both names will always be written in italics. You may also find a third and fourth name that will be the variety and cultivar. *Aquilegia chrysantha hickleyana* "Texas Gold", translation, Texas Gold Columbine.

Before Dr. Linnaeus tidied things up in the Latin name world, some plants like the Carnation had a name that was NINE Latin and Greek names strung together to include almost every physical attribute seen by the naked eye, including leaf shapes, height, color, and spreading habits of each plant. That was a headache looking for a place to happen. Dr. Linnaeus simplified the descriptive characteristics of plants with his system. Not everyone liked it, but fortunately for us, it became the accepted form that is still used today. There is actually a more detailed organization chart for each plant family, but that could be a complete information overload for this article.

Pronouncing those names can be a headache too. A lot of good gardening books and magazines will print the Latin name and follow it with a phonetic spelling to help pronounce it. I've also found web sites that have audible guides. Fine Gardening's website, [www.finegardening.com](http://www.finegardening.com) has a great one. Scroll down the main page, and click on "Pronunciation guide for plants". It's a big help to actually hear it said correctly.

Now that I've gone through the naming process, you should know there is a movement afoot out there to change up the names on a lot of plants. It is due in no small part to DNA research which gives scientists far more detailed information on each plant, which has lead to the realization some plants thought to be related are not at all. That information has already required the reclassification and renaming of a number of plants. Science is a wonderful tool that ultimately benefits everyone, even if we have to deal with some confusion at first. This renaming thing looks like another possible headache in the making though.

Shakespeare wrote in *Romeo & Juliet* "What is in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet". I'll be he didn't have a botanist or a taxonomist in the room when he did.