Naming of Plants

A professional in the field of horticulture must be able to identify plants by scientific names and recognize there many common names. There is often confusion when the common name cedar is applied to plants that include arborvitae, cedar, cypress, false cypress and junipers.

The American Joint Committee on Horticultural Nomenclature has adopted 'Standardized Plant Names', a dictionary on plant names. In this book, every plant is listed with at least two names. The first is the name of the genus to which the plant belongs. The second word describes the name of the species. In addition, each plant has one or more common names.

Pinus contorta is the botanical name of the Shore Pine found on the Pacific Coast. It is known by that name the world over. It has other common names such as Contorted Pine, Coast Pine and Beach Pine. Genus names are always capitalized and species descriptions are usually not. Giving plants a genus and species name was credited to a Swedish botanist, Linnaeus, 1701-1778. He was appalled at the confusion of the many latinized adjectives added to each plant to distinguish one from the other. He sought to give each plant a name that could be used any place in the world. This system of naming plants is called the binomial system of nomenclature. It is based in Latin.

Within a species, a subgroup (subspecies) may be different enough in appearance from the remaining members of the species to be called a botanical variety. Individuals of this group display marked differences, which are inheritable to succeeding generations. An example of this would be *Taxus baccata var. fastigiata*, which is Irish Yew, a botanical variety of the English Yew, *Taxus baccata*.

The International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants recognizes a special category, the cultivar (cultivated variety of old horticultural variety), which designates a special group of individuals, significant for the purposes of agriculture, forestry or horticulture, and which retain their distinguishing features when reproduced vegetivley not from seed. In writing the name of such a plant, the cultivar name is written in the common language and is set off by a capital letter and single quotation marks. For example: *Acer platanoides 'Drummondii', Harlequin maple* or *Viburnum tinus 'Spring Bouquet'*, Spring Bouquet Laurustinus.

It is especially important for the professional horticulturist to know the correct botanical and accepted common names of the plants being sold in the industry. In 1972 and 1973 the Washington State Department of Agriculture set down requirements that all non-herbaceous ornamental plants be properly labeled when offered for resale.

To the novice, the number of names to learn seems overwhelming. It is not necessary or possible to know them all. One should start by recognizing and learning frequently used plants in the Pacific Northwest, and know how to look them up in reference books for more information. The botanical name is the key to locating information that is written about a particular plant. Knowing botanical names will help set you apart as a professional horticulturist.

Botanical names can be extremely helpful to the professional in telling much about certain characteristics of the plants. For this reason, further study of the scientific or botanical terms is recommended. The meanings of some of these Latin words that help describe a plant are:

affinis — related
alatus — winged
alba — white
albiflorus — white flowered
alpestris — nearly alpine
alpinus — alpine
alternifolia — alternate-leaved
altissima — tallest
amabilis — lovely
angulatus — angular, angled
angustifolius — narrowed-leaved
apiculata — short pointed tip
aquifolium — holly leaved
arborea — treelike, woody
arenarius — of sand or sandy places
argentea — silvery
attenuata — slenderly tapering
aureu — golden
australis — southern
baccatus — berried
barbatus — barbed, bearded
bipinnata — twice pinnate (leaflets on each side of a common petiole, like a feather)
brevicaulis — short stemmed
brevifolius — short leaved
buxifolius — box leaved
campestris — of the fields or plains
canadensis — from Canada
candidus — pure white, shining
coccineus — scarlet
communis — common, general
concolor — of uniform color
confertus — crowded, pressed together
cordate — heart shaped
crassifolius — thick leaved
crenata — toothed, teeth rounded
crenulatus — finely scalloped
cuspidata — short, rigid point
cyaneus — blue
debilis — weak, frail
decorus — elegant, comely, becoming
decurrens — running down the stem
densiflorus — heavily flowered
denticulata — toothed slightly or minutely
dimorphous — occurring in two forms
dioecious — male and female flowers on separate plants
divergens — wide spreading
edulis — edible
elatus — tall
elegans —elegant, beautiful

elongatus — elongated, lengthened
falcatus — like a sickle
fastigiatus — branches erect and close together
floribunda — free flowering
floridus — flowering freely
fragilis — fragile, brittle
fruticosus — shrubby
glauca — with white or gray as on blue spruce
globosa — globe shaped
gracilis — graceful, slender
grandiflorus — large flowered
herbaceous — non-woody above ground stem
hirsuta — with coarse or stiff hairs
illicifolius — ilex-leaved, holly-leaved
inermis — unarmed, without thorns
japonica — of Japan
laciniatus — torn, fringed
lanceolate — shaped like a lance-head
lineatus — with lines or striped
littoralis — of the seashore
lucidus — bright, shining, clear
lusitanicus — of Portugal
lutescens — yellow
macrophyllus — large leaved
marginatus — with a margin or striped
mas — male
maxiums — largest
microphylla — small leaved
mollis — soft, soft-hairy
monstrosus — monstrous, abnormal
mucronata — with small, abrupt tip
multicolor — many-colored
nana — dwarf
Niger, nigra — black
nivalis — snowy, white
obtusa — blunt
occidentalis — western, New World
odoratissimum — very fragrant
officinalis — medicinal
oxycanthus — sharp-spined
papyrifera — paper bearing
parviflorus — small-flowered
pendulus — pendulous, hanging
petiolaris — with a leafstalk
pisifera — pea-bearing
platycladus — broad-branched
plicata — planted, folded lengthwise
polyanthus — many-flowered
procerus — tall

procumbens — trailing, prostrate
prolifera — many-leaved
prostratus — lying flat
pubescens — short, soft hairs; downy
pumilis — dwarf
pungens — piercing; sharp-pointed, sharp tasting
purpurea – purple
pyramidalis — like a pyramid; inverted cone
quinquefolia — five leaves or leaflets
radiatus — rayed
radicans — rooting
recurvata — bent backward, reversely curved
repens, reptans — creeping
rex — king
rhytidophyllus — wrinkle-leaved
rigidus — stiff
rotundifolius — round-leaved
rugosa — wrinkled
saccharum — of sugar
saxatilis — found among rocks
scabrous — rough to the touch
sempervirens — evergreen
serrata — serrate, toothed
speciosus — showy, good-looking
squamatus — with scale-like leaves or bracts
stellata — star-like
stoloniferous — producing runners that root
stricta — upright, with few or no branches
suffruticosa — shrubby
sylvatica — forest-loving
ternatus — in threes (as clover leaflets)
tremuloides — quivering, trembling
triacanthos — three-spined
truncata — cut off squarely
umbraculifera — umbrella-bearing
undulata — waxy surface or margin
vegetus — vigorous
verrucosa — warty
verticillatus —whorled
viridis — green
viscosus — sticky
vulgaris — common
whorl — leaves, etc., in a circle around stem

List of Landscape Plants

The Washington Certification Professional Horticulturist examination will have a section in which you will identify a selection of plants from the WSNLA Plant List. Your knowledge of these plants should also include ability to write a basic description such as growth habit & fruit or flower color. The following entries are listed alphabetically according to botanical name, within seven growth habit categories.

Some botanical names have had to be corrected; the old names are in parentheses. Whenever species, varieties or cultivars are indicated after a genus, assume that you should learn the ones commonly used in your area as any of these may be on your examination.