

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68553-5 - The Names of Plants, Fourth Edition

David Gledhill

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THE NAMES OF PLANTS

The Names of Plants is an invaluable reference for botanists and horticulturalists. The first section gives an historical account of the significant changes in the ways by which plants have been known and named. It documents the problems associated with an ever-increasing number of common names of plants, and the resolution of these problems through the introduction of International Codes for both botanical and horticultural nomenclature. It also outlines the rules to be followed when plant breeders name a new species or cultivar of plant.

The second section comprises a glossary of generic and specific plant names, and components of these, from which the reader may interpret the existing names of plants and construct new names. With explanations of the International Codes for both Botanical Nomenclature and Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants, this new edition contains a greatly expanded glossary, which includes the Greek, Latin, or other source of each plant name.

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Preface to the first edition

Originally entitled *The Naming of Plants and the Meanings of Plant Names*, this book is in two parts. The first part has been written as an account of the way in which the naming of plants has changed with time and why the changes were necessary. It has not been the writer's intention to dwell upon the more fascinating aspects of common names but rather to progress from these to the situation which exists today, in which the botanical and horticultural names of plants must conform to internationally agreed standards. The aim has been to produce an interesting text which is equally as acceptable to the amateur gardener as to the botanist. The temptation to make this a definitive guide to the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature was resisted since others have done this already and with great clarity. A brief comment on synonymous and illegitimate botanical names and a reference to recent attempts to accommodate the various traits and interests in the naming of cultivated plants was added after the first edition.

The book had its origins in a collection of Latin plant names, and their meanings in English, which continued to grow by the year but which could never be complete. Not all plant names have meaningful translations. Some of the botanical literature gives full citation of plant names (and translations of the names, as well as common names). There are, however, many horticultural and botanical publications in which plant names are used in a casual manner, or are mis-spelled, or are given meanings or common names that are neither translations nor common (in the world-wide sense). There is also a tendency that may be part of modern language, to reduce names of garden plants to an abbreviated form (e.g. Rhodo for *Rhododendron*). Literal names such as Vogel's *Napoleona*, for *Napoleona vogelii*, provide only limited information about the plant. The dedication of the genus to Napoleon Bonaparte is not informative. Only by further search of the literature will the reader find that Theodor Vogel was the botanist to the 1841 Niger expedition and that he collected some 150 specimens during a rainy July fortnight in Liberia. One of those specimens, number 45, was a *Napoleona* that was later named for him as the type of the new species by Hooker and Planchon. To have given such information would have made the text very much larger.

The author has compiled a glossary which should serve to translate the more meaningful and descriptive names of plants from anywhere on earth but which will give little information about many of the people and places commemorated in plant names. Their entries do little more than identify the persons for whom the names were raised and their period in history. The author makes no claim that the glossary is all-encompassing or that the meanings he has listed are always the only meanings that have been put upon the various entries. Authors of Latin names have not always explained the meanings of the names they have erected and, consequently, such names may have been given different meanings by subsequent writers.

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Preface to the fourth edition

This book is intended for use by botanists, gardeners and others who have an interest in plant names, the manner and rules by which they are formed, their origins and their meanings. The evolution of our current taxonomic system, from its origins in classical Greece to its present situation, is dealt with in the first part. This presents an overview of some major aspects of resolving the earlier unregulated way of naming plants. It goes on to explain how the current system evolved, and the use of Latin as the universal, and often innovative, language for those names. It then treats the naming of cultivated plants, from the wild, produced by hybridization or by sporting, maintained only by vegetative means, in horticulture, agriculture or arboriculture, and perhaps differing only in single small features. These are subject to the botanical rules of nomenclature but also have their own set of international rules for the naming of garden variants. Both Codes (the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature and the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants) are explained.

The main body of the book has been considerably enlarged for this edition. It consists of a glossary of over 17,000 names or components of names. Each entry contains an indication of the source from which the name is derived. The components (prefixes or suffixes) are often common to medicine and zoology, as are many of the people commemorated in plant names, and where zoology interposes with botany (e.g. gall insects) the gardener will find these explained. Algae and fungi are not primary components of the glossary but many which are commonly encountered in gardening or forestry are included.

The glossary does not claim to be comprehensive but does provide a tool for discovering the meaning of huge numbers of plant names or constructing names for new plants. The author has included some of the views of other writers on the meanings of certain names but accepts that classicists may rue his non-use of diacritics.