

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-69375-3 - A Primer of Botanical Latin with Vocabulary
Emma Short and Alex George AM
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Part I

Grammar

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-69375-3 - A Primer of Botanical Latin with Vocabulary

Emma Short and Alex George AM

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1

The noun (Stearn pp. 57–88)

A noun is the name of a thing, person, place or quality, e.g. plant, Bentham, Australia, air, knowledge, beauty. A generic name is also a noun. A Latin noun has *number* (singular or plural) and *gender* (masculine, feminine or neuter). It is *declined* by changing the ending of the word in order to give different meanings and to show its relationship to other words in a sentence. These endings are called *cases*. There are five groups, or declensions, of nouns, called simply the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Declensions. Nouns of a declension form their word endings (cases) in the same way when they are declined. The various endings are attached to the *stem* of the word, which is the ‘core’ or basic part of a word that remains the same when letters are added to give different cases. The stem of a noun is derived differently according to its declension. To decline a noun fully is to list its forms in all the cases, both singular and plural.

Within a declension there are, for practical purposes, six cases, but for botanical Latin you need to know just five. Then, there are two numbers – singular when there is just one, and plural when there are two or more. The case endings are changed to indicate the plural form. Unfortunately, some case endings are used more than once with different meanings.

The cases are (Stearn pp. 62–66):

Nominative – used when the noun is the subject of a sentence (We use ‘sentence’ in the sense of a group of words terminated with a full stop; normally it includes a verb but botanical Latin commonly omits the verb in its telegraphic style.)

Accusative – used when the noun is the object, either of a sentence or after a noun within a compound sentence. It is commonly used with a preposition.

Genitive – indicates possession, the ‘of’ case, e.g. the surface *of a leaf*, also given in English as the *leaf’s* surface (the possessive ‘s’, not to be confused with ‘s’ showing one or more missing letters, as in ‘she’s right’).

Dative – indicates ‘to’ or ‘for’ something, e.g. ‘A’ is related to [or similar to] ‘B’ (but not when some motion or action is involved, e.g. ‘joined to the stem’, when you use the accusative). It also indicates possession, e.g. *mihi* (literally ‘to me’, i.e. ‘mine’) and *nobis* (‘to us’, i.e. ‘ours’).

Ablative – indicates ‘by’, ‘with’, ‘from’ or ‘in’ something, e.g. anther *with apiculum*, fruit *with horns*, written *by Linnaeus*.

We now come to the declensions themselves. Where possible we use botanical terms as the examples and, for many of them, since you may have access to Stearn, different examples from his. The genders are denoted by m. (masculine), n. (neuter) and f. (feminine).

First Declension (Stearn pp. 66–68)

When you look up the Latin for a noun, **always** check not only the declension *number* but also the *gender*, especially if you are going to add further description of the noun, e.g. white petals. Usually the gender is indicated by the ending of the nominative case of a noun, but there are exceptions. Thus, nouns of the First Declension are usually feminine, but we also give the masculine *agricola* below.

Example: *macula* (f.) a spot.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>macula</i>	the/a spot (subject)	<i>maculae</i>	the spots (subject)
Accusative	<i>maculam</i>	the/a spot (object)	<i>maculas</i>	the spots (object)
Genitive	<i>maculae</i>	of a spot	<i>macularum</i>	of the spots
Dative	<i>maculae</i>	to/for a spot	<i>maculis</i>	to/for the spots
Ablative	<i>macula</i>	by/with/from a spot	<i>maculis</i>	by/with/from the spots

Example: *agricola* (m.) field-dweller.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>agricola</i>	the/a field-dweller (subject)	<i>agricolae</i>	the field-dwellers (subject)
Accusative	<i>agricolam</i>	the/a field-dweller (object)	<i>agricolas</i>	the field-dwellers (object)
Genitive	<i>agricolae</i>	of a field-dweller	<i>agricolarum</i>	of the field-dwellers
Dative	<i>agricolae</i>	to/for a field-dweller	<i>agricolis</i>	to/for the field-dwellers
Ablative	<i>agricola</i>	by/with/from a field-dweller	<i>agricolis</i>	by/with/from the field-dwellers

Note that the main part of the noun – in these examples ‘*macul-*’ and ‘*agricol-*’ – remains the same: this is called the *stem* (not to be confused with the stem of a plant, although it *is* the part of a noun to which other parts are attached). In nouns of the First Declension, the stem is usually the nominative of the noun less its final letter. Note also that some endings are the same for different cases. This is less of a problem when translating *into* Latin, since you determine the appropriate ending and use it. When translating *from* Latin, you can usually determine the case from the position of the word in the sentence and any associated words.

Many names of genera ending in *-a* are declined like *macula*. You rarely need to decline them unless comparing one genus with another, e.g. *Grevillea* with *Hakea*, but you can avoid this by abbreviating them (*G.*, *H.*), provided that your meaning is unambiguous.

Likewise, many geographical names end in *-a* (e.g. Australia) and are also declined this way, though, again, you rarely need to do so, and almost never in the plural form.

Feminine personal names such as Helena and Julia are declined in the First Declension.

Words ending in *-cola* (which means inhabitant) are often used as specific epithets. Examples include *saxicola* (inhabitant of rocks), *nivicola* (inhabitant of snow), *planticola* (inhabitant of plants, for an epiphyte). When used as epithets they are used as nouns in apposition and are of common gender, i.e. masculine, feminine or neuter, and so, regardless of the gender of a generic name, they are declined like *agricola*, above.

Some nouns of Greek origin, ending in *-e*, are First Declension and have some different case endings. They are generally used only in the singular. Examples are *pseudoraphe* and generic names such as *Aloe*, *Anemone*, *Michrochaete*.

Example: *micropyle* (f.) micropyle.

Case		Singular
Nominative	<i>micropyle</i>	micropyle (subject)
Accusative	<i>micropylen</i>	micropyle (object)
Genitive	<i>micropyles</i>	of a micropyle
Dative	<i>micropylae</i>	to/for a micropyle
Ablative	<i>micropyle</i>	by/with/from a micropyle

Second Declension (Stearn pp. 68–71)

To the Second Declension belong most nouns ending in *-us*, and also *-um* and *-er*. In those ending in *-er* the stem is also slightly modified once you leave the nominative singular. Nouns of this declension ending in *-us* are almost all masculine, exceptions being *virus* which is neuter, and the names of trees which are commonly feminine; those ending in *-um* are neuter; and those ending in *-er* are either masculine or, occasionally, feminine.

Thus, we need several examples to illustrate this declension. First, words ending in *-us*.

Example: *ramus* (m.) a branch.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>ramus</i>	the/a branch (subject)	<i>rami</i>	the branches (subject)
Accusative	<i>ramum</i>	the/a branch (object)	<i>ramos</i>	the branches (object)
Genitive	<i>rami</i>	of a branch	<i>ramorum</i>	of the branches
Dative	<i>ramo</i>	to/for a branch	<i>ramis</i>	to/for the branches
Ablative	<i>ramo</i>	by/with/from a branch	<i>ramis</i>	by/with/from the branches

Here the stem is *ram-*, i.e. you drop the last two letters, *us*. Most generic names ending in *-us* (e.g. *Eriochilus*, *Sonchus*) are declined this way, and most are masculine except those containing all or mostly trees, such as *Eucalyptus*, which are feminine (the Romans believed that every tree was the home of a female nymph or dryad). Most Latinised masculine personal names are also declined like *ramus*, e.g. Linnaeus. The Greek *-anthos* is declined in the same way as its more common Latin ending *-anthus*, i.e. apart from the nominative singular it's like *ramus*.

Next, words ending in *-um*.

Example: *rostrum* (n.) a beak.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>rostrum</i>	the/a beak (subject)	<i>rostra</i>	the beaks (subject)
Accusative	<i>rostrum</i>	the/a beak (object)	<i>rostra</i>	the beaks (object)
Genitive	<i>rostri</i>	of a beak	<i>rostrorum</i>	of the beaks
Dative	<i>rostro</i>	to/for a beak	<i>rostris</i>	to/for the beaks
Ablative	<i>rostro</i>	by/with/from a beak	<i>rostris</i>	by/with/from the beaks

Like the last, the stem is formed by dropping the last two letters, thus *rostr-*. Here you have to remember that *rostrum* is neuter, hence the plural *-a* ending differs in meaning from the singular *-a* ending of nouns of the First Declension.

Generic names ending in *-um* are all neuter and are declined this way, e.g. *Crinum*. So, also, are nouns and generic names taken from Greek and ending in *-on* (e.g. *Abutilon*), treating the *-on* ending as if it were *-um*.

Then, words ending in *-er*. Here there is a complication because the stem is modified, but in botanical Latin you have to deal with very few, most *-er* nouns being in the Third Declension. Our example is *liber* (a book, inner bark), an important word to know in order to avoid confusion with the adjective *liber* (free), which we will meet later. To form the stem, the *-er* ending is changed to *-r*, giving *libr-*. Here sit a few generic names such as *Cotoneaster* and personal names such as Solander.

Example: *liber* (m.) a book.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>liber</i>	the/a book (subject)	<i>libri</i>	the books (subject)
Accusative	<i>librum</i>	the/a book (object)	<i>libros</i>	the books (object)
Genitive	<i>libri</i>	of a book	<i>librorum</i>	of the books
Dative	<i>libro</i>	to/for a book	<i>libris</i>	to/for the books
Ablative	<i>libro</i>	by/with/from a book	<i>libris</i>	by/with/from the books

Third Declension (Stearn pp. 72–87)

In the Third Declension we deal with nouns of all genders, with the nominative case ending in *-al*, *-ar*, *-as*, *-ax*, *-e*, *-en*, *-er*, *-es*, *-ex*, *-i*, *-in*, *-is*, *-ix*, *-ma*, *-nx*, *-o*, *-on*, *-or*, *-os*, *-s* (after a consonant), *-us*, *-ut*, *-ux*, *-ys* and *-yx*. You rarely have to deal with some of these, so we will not go further here with those ending in *-i*, *-in* and *-ys*.

Here we have cases typically ending in *-em* (accusative singular), *-is* (genitive singular), *-i* (dative singular), *-e* or *-i* (ablative singular), *-es* or *-a* (nominative and accusative plural), *-um* (genitive plural), and *-ibus* (dative and ablative plural).

Note that in some, the nominative and accusative singular have the same ending, but in others these cases differ. In all nouns of the Third Declension, the nominative and accusative plural are the same.

At this point, we have to confess a slight complication. Comparing the endings of the Third Declension above carefully with the tables of nouns over the next few pages, you will notice that some form the ablative singular with *-i*, and the nominative, accusative and genitive plural also with an extra *-i*. These are called *i*-stem nouns. They retain an *-i* at the end of their stem and are divided into two groups: neuter nouns that end in *-al*, *-ar* and *-re*, and masculine or feminine nouns, which are almost all monosyllabic, ending in *-s* or *-x* while having two consonants at the end of the genitive stem (e.g. *dens*, *dentis*, masculine, tooth, and *nox*, *noctis*, feminine, night). The extra *-i* tends to feature in masculine and feminine *i*- stems in the genitive plural only, whereas in neuter nouns the ‘*i*’ appears in the ablative singular, nominative, accusative and genitive plurals.

Nouns ending in -al

Botanical Latin words with this ending are few, but we include an example in case you have to use one. They are neuter.

Example: *animal* (n.) an animal.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>animal</i>	the/an animal (subject)	<i>animalia</i>	the animals (subject)
Accusative	<i>animal</i>	the/an animal (object)	<i>animalia</i>	the animals (object)
Genitive	<i>animalis</i>	of an animal	<i>animalium</i>	of the animals
Dative	<i>animali</i>	to/for an animal	<i>animalibus</i>	to/for the animals
Ablative	<i>animali</i>	by/with/from an animal	<i>animalibus</i>	by/with/from the animals

Nouns ending in -ar

Example: *par* (n.) a pair.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>par</i>	the/a pair (subject)	<i>paria</i>	the pairs (subject)
Accusative	<i>par</i>	the/a pair (object)	<i>paria</i>	the pairs (object)
Genitive	<i>paris</i>	of a pair	<i>parium</i>	of the pairs
Dative	<i>pari</i>	to/for a pair	<i>paribus</i>	to/for the pairs
Ablative	<i>pari</i>	by/with/from a pair	<i>paribus</i>	by/with/from the pairs

Further examples are *calcar* (a spur), *nectar* (nectar [not nectary, which is *nectarium*]). These are neuter.

Nouns ending in -as

Sometimes a ‘t’ is inserted before the case endings, as in the example below, and at other times a ‘d’, so generic names such as *Cycas* form the genitive singular *Cycadis*.

Example: *varietas* (f.) a variety.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>varietas</i>	the/a variety (subject)	<i>varietates</i>	the varieties (subject)
Accusative	<i>varietatem</i>	the/a variety (object)	<i>varietates</i>	the varieties (object)
Genitive	<i>varietatis</i>	of a variety	<i>varietatum</i>	of the varieties
Dative	<i>varietati</i>	to/for a variety	<i>varietatibus</i>	to/for the varieties
Ablative	<i>varietate</i>	by/with/from a variety	<i>varietatibus</i>	by/with/from the varieties

Nouns ending in -ax

Botanical Latin words with this ending seem to be all genera, but we include an example in case you have to use one. Some are masculine, some feminine.

Example: *Smilax* (f.) a genus of Smilacaceae.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>Smilax</i>	the/a <i>Smilax</i> (subject)	<i>Smilaces</i>	the <i>Smilaxes</i> (subject)
Accusative	<i>Smilacem</i>	the/a <i>Smilax</i> (object)	<i>Smilaces</i>	the <i>Smilaxes</i> (object)
Genitive	<i>Smilacis</i>	of a <i>Smilax</i>	<i>Smilacum</i>	of the <i>Smilaxes</i>
Dative	<i>Smilaci</i>	to/for a <i>Smilax</i>	<i>Smilacibus</i>	to/for the <i>Smilaxes</i>
Ablative	<i>Smilace</i>	by/with/from a <i>Smilax</i>	<i>Smilacibus</i>	by/with/from the <i>Smilaxes</i>

Nouns ending in -e

The stem is formed by removing the final ‘e’. These nouns are neuter.

Example: *vegetabile* (n.) a plant.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>vegetabile</i>	the/a plant (subject)	<i>vegetabilia</i>	the plants (subject)
Accusative	<i>vegetabile</i>	the/a plant (object)	<i>vegetabilia</i>	the plants (object)
Genitive	<i>vegetabilis</i>	of a plant	<i>vegetabilium</i>	of the plants
Dative	<i>vegetabili</i>	to/for a plant	<i>vegetabilibus</i>	to/for the plants
Ablative	<i>vegetabili</i>	by/with/from a plant	<i>vegetabilibus</i>	by/with/from the plants

Like *vegetabile* is *mare* (the sea).

Nouns ending in -en

The stem is the nominative form modified to -in-. These nouns are all neuter.

Example: *legumen* (n.) a pod.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>legumen</i>	the/a pod (subject)	<i>legumina</i>	the pods (subject)
Accusative	<i>legumen</i>	the/a pod (object)	<i>legumina</i>	the pods (object)
Genitive	<i>leguminis</i>	of a pod	<i>leguminum</i>	of the pods
Dative	<i>legumini</i>	to/for a pod	<i>leguminibus</i>	to/for the pods
Ablative	<i>legumine</i>	by/with/from a pod	<i>leguminibus</i>	by/with/from the pods

Another example is *cacumen* (a peak, summit).

Nouns ending in -er

The stem is the nominative form. These are all neuter.

Example: *Papaver* (n.) a genus of Papaveraceae.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>Papaver</i>	the/a poppy (subject)	<i>Papavera</i>	the poppies (subject)
Accusative	<i>Papaver</i>	the/a poppy (object)	<i>Papavera</i>	the poppies (object)
Genitive	<i>Papaveris</i>	of a poppy	<i>Papaverum</i>	of the poppies
Dative	<i>Papaveri</i>	to/for a poppy	<i>Papaveribus</i>	to/for the poppies
Ablative	<i>Papavere</i>	by/with/from a poppy	<i>Papaveribus</i>	by/with/from the poppies

Nouns ending in -es

The stem is formed by dropping the -es and adding -it-. These are either masculine or feminine.

Example: *caespes* (m.) a tuft.

Case		Singular		Plural
Nominative	<i>caespes</i>	the/a tuft (subject)	<i>caespites</i>	the tufts (subject)
Accusative	<i>caespitem</i>	the/a tuft (object)	<i>caespites</i>	the tufts (object)
Genitive	<i>caespitis</i>	of a tuft	<i>caespitum</i>	of the tufts
Dative	<i>caespiti</i>	to/for a tuft	<i>caespitibus</i>	to/for the tufts
Ablative	<i>caespite</i>	by/with/from a tuft	<i>caespitibus</i>	by/with/from the tufts