

P-touch Labels for Plants

by DJ Miles, Master Gardener

Do you ever wish you could remember the name of that majestic hydrangea or that feathery tall grass you have growing by your pond? When friends visit, do they ask the name of your ruby-colored fuchsia or your amazing deep purple phlox? If so, you might want to consider labeling some of your garden plants.

Yes, it is time consuming, and no, there is no easy way to do it. It takes commitment and determination on your part to do a good job. Let me explain.

First of all, you need to know the name of your plant variety or cultivar. If you don't have the original tag it came with, you are in for a bit of a challenge. That is where good gardening books with lots of photos and the Internet become essential detective tools. Once you have determined the proper name, it is important to spell it correctly. Remember, these tags will be seen by others who visit, and more importantly, you. You see these labels every time you walk by your plants, and the name becomes reinforced, so take the time to get it right the first time.

You also have the choice of whether to include the common name of your plant on a label. I originally thought that was a fine idea, but later changed my mind. Two reasons: first, the writing on the labels had to be very small in order to incorporate both botanical (scientific or Latin) and common names, making it hard to read; and second, I kept referring to the plant by the common name every time I saw it, because it was easier than trying to pronounce the Latin name. This behavior was annoying, because I wanted my plants labeled so I would become more familiar and comfortable with their Latin names.

Now comes the hard part, deciding which labeling system to use: plastic tags with permanent markers, copper tags you impress with a stylus, or No. 2 pencil on metal? Believe me, I've tried them all, and a few others. None of them were very effective. Time would fade anything I used as a writing implement, and the impressed copper plates were very expensive and hard to read.

I was visiting an open garden in my old neighborhood one weekend about four years ago and noticed the couple had a great deal of their plants labeled and the labels looked great! I was so excited when they shared with me their 'secret weapon.' "We use a P-Touch labeling machine," she said. I said, "What?" She kindly repeated. And I said "What?" again. "Please spell it for me." P-touch. She said I could probably find it at the local office supply store, so I went looking. Cost was no issue. This thing worked!

I asked the salesman at the store and he showed me what I was looking for. I had no idea what it really consisted of. It looked like an old-fashioned Dictaphone machine with a cassette tape inside, six AA batteries in the bottom, and a small keyboard on the top. About 6" wide, 8" long and 2" high. I said, "Great, I'll take one." He said "Which tape would you like?" Apparently, you get to choose the color of tape and the width. I chose something in the middle—white tape, 3/4 inch wide.



My total bill was under \$50. I was set. I was going to have great looking, readable labels now. I could hardly wait till I got home to open it up, stick the tape in and start typing my plant names into it.

I found it came with some pretty cool little options. Different font types, and print sizes. Also a memory, so you can print names again without retyping them. Of course, a print button and a cut button, which severs the tape free from the cassette so you can then peel off the backing and place your new label on a tag. I chose metal tags. The gal from my old neighborhood clued me in on the fact she had placed some of her labels on little plastic tags and when she accidentally stepped on some, they broke and she had to make new ones, so she suggested I use metal tags.

I will tell you I am sold on this cute little labeling system. It really does work. I can easily read my tags. Some have been in my garden now for over three years and look just as great as when I originally put them in. The label really sticks well to plastic or metal. It can be peeled off to reuse the tag, if a plant dies, heaven forbid!



I encourage you to take up the challenge and get to know your plants better by labeling. You reinforce your plant names when you look them up, find out their spelling, typing them into your labeling machine, adhering them to your tags and seeing them next to your plants every time you walk by. I



am now pretty comfortable in saying, "Yes, isn't that a great looking *Chameacyparis pisifera* 'Snow'"?

No endorsement of the P-touch labeling system is implied.