

Love Under Any Other Name

By Carol Barany

Plants were studied long before recorded history, and every civilization had its own unique system of naming. With the Age of Exploration came conquest, and plants were taken from their native habitats and carried across the globe. Imagine a teeming arena of thousands of newly introduced plants. Getting their name wrong could be serious, especially if the plant was used medicinally. To make sense of the chaos, Carl von Linné used Latin to devise a naming system he called binomial nomenclature in 1753. He believed in the system so completely that he Latinized his own name to Carolus Linnaeus.

The system is still in use today.

Since becoming a Master Gardener, I've learned to love Latin. While I aim to spell the terms correctly, I don't worry about proper pronunciation. I give it my best shot and speak with authority. It's amazing how many people I've fooled.

The genus and species names together comprise the scientific name that every plant is given when first described by a scientist. These Latin names are recognized by botanists and gardeners no matter where you go in the world. The first begins with a capital letter and is the genus, a large group of related plants with common characteristics. Genus names are fascinating, some with roots in mythology or literature.

The second word of the name refers to species, and is lower case. It's usually a Latin adjective, describing some aspect of the plant, such as its origin, color, habitat, size, or shape. *Saxatilis* and *rupestris* mean "of rocks", while *arenarius* is "of sand". Fuzzy plants are described as *lanatus*, *hirtus*, or *lanuginosus*, while those with silvery leaves may be *argenteus*, *griseus*, or *cinereus*.

Some plants require a third name, the botanical variety. This form of the species has something naturally occurring and special about it, separating it from the more common form. Cultivars are new varieties of plants that resulted from intentionally crossing two separate species, and also require a third name.

Let's use Blue Bells of Scotland, *Campanula rotundifolia*, as an example. 'Campan' means 'bell', referring to bell shaped flowers. 'Rotund' means 'round', 'foli' means 'leaves', and *rotundifolia* means 'round-leaved'. If a new variety was discovered with white flowers, rather than blue, 'alba' (meaning white) would be added at the end of the name. *Campanula rotundifolia* 'alba' has white, bell-shaped flowers, and round leaves.

Another important reason for using Latin botanical names is that with over quarter of a million different species of plants, not all of them have a common name. Even when they

do, a botanical name is universally recognized and avoids confusion. For example, Rose of Sharon is *Hibiscus syriacus* in the United States, and *Hypericum calycinium* in the United Kingdom.

Valentine's Day is almost here, and a column about binomial nomenclature is like getting a toaster from your sweetheart. It's useful and practical, but not very romantic.

It just so happens that some of my favorite cutting garden annuals have charming, old-fashioned names that perfectly describe them, without a word of Latin. What's in a name? *Nigella damascena*, *Persicaria orientalis*, *Cardiospermum halicacabum*, and *Amaranthus caudatus* have been better known to generations of English-speaking gardeners as 'Love In a Mist', 'Kiss Me Over the Garden Gate', 'Love In a Puff', and 'Love Lies Bleeding'.

A misty tangle of ferny foliage surrounding flowers of blue, plum, white, or pink, earned 'Love in a Mist' its name. When flowers fade, amazing football-shaped seed pods form and beg to be included in bouquets. While the flowers seem delicate, this is one of the hardiest early bloomers around. Direct sow the seeds, since this plant does not like transplanting. It will re-sow itself reliably, year after year.

How tall do you have to be to 'Kiss Me Over the Garden Gate'? Pendulous, lipstick-pink blossoms dangle from stems at least seven feet tall. In a mixed bouquet, this is the blossom that gets all the attention. Brought to America from Asia by sea merchants, Thomas Jefferson grew it at Monticello. Sown directly into the garden once, it will re-seed happily for years.

'Love In a Puff', a ferny-leaved annual vine, uses tendrils to scamper ten feet, covering a trellis in just a few months. Tiny white blossoms mature to green, balloon-like pods. Inside are tiny black seeds, each imprinted with a perfect white heart ('*Cardiospermum*' is derived from the Greek words for 'heart' and 'seed'). It can be sown directly into the garden.

What's in the name 'Love Lies Bleeding'? How about brilliant burgundy-red floral ropes, up to two feet long, spilling from sturdy stems that can reach five feet. From midsummer until frost, this beauty adds a loose, textural element to bouquets. It's another reliable re-seeder, and also comes in a gorgeous shade of green and some pastels.

Iris you a sweet Valentine's Day. I really lilac you, and will seed you later!