

PLANT NAMING

Rules of naming

The rules for naming cultivated plants have been framed with the intention of being as simple as possible while still limiting to a minimum the potential for ambiguity, confusion and duplication and promoting clarity, stability and standardisation. Outlined below are the main points to consider when providing a new name, as given in the ninth edition of the International Code for Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants (ICNCP).

1. Cultivar names should not be in Latin form

With a few exceptions cultivar epithets formed on or after 1 January 1959 should not be entirely in Latin form. The exceptions include those based on previously published names at a rank governed by the Botanical Code, as well as Latin words that are in current use in a language other than Latin, for example as terms, common phrases, personal names or place names. Latin or Latinised words can also be used in combination with words in a modern language as in 'Loderi King George'.

2. Cultivar names should be as short as practical

Cultivar epithets should not contain excessively long words that may be difficult to write or pronounce. On or after 1 January 1996 they must consist of no more than 30 characters (Roman letters, numbers and permitted punctuation marks and symbols), excluding spaces and the demarcating single quotation marks.

3. Cultivar names can be made-up words

Cultivar epithets do not have to consist of existing words but may be novel inventions. They can take the form of a code of up to 10 letters excluding spaces. However, they must not consist only of a single letter or only of numerals.

4. Cultivar names should not make exaggerated claims

After 1 January 1959 cultivar epithets must not include superlatives relating to the merits of the cultivar (e.g. 'Earliest of All'); these could become confusing through later introduction of cultivars of similar (or better) qualities.

5. Some words are banned from cultivar names

After 1 January 1959 cultivar epithets may not contain the words "form" or "variety" or their abbreviations or equivalents in other languages. After 1 January 1996 cultivar epithets may not contain the following words: "cultivar", "grex", "group", "hybrid", "maintenance", "mixture", "selection", "sport", "series" and "strain" or the plural of these words, or the words "improved" and "transformed", or their equivalents in any language.

6. Symbols and some punctuation are banned from cultivar names

After 1 January 1996 only the apostrophe ('), comma (,), up to two non-adjacent exclamation marks (!), the full stop (.), the hyphen (-), forward slash (/) or backward slash (\) can be included in cultivar names.

7. Words in cultivar names should be spelled in full

Cultivar epithets or parts of them should not be abbreviated with the exception of words or forms of address normally abbreviated by linguistic custom (e.g. Mr in place of Mister). The use of such abbreviations is optional and if desired the abbreviated word may be spelled in full, the two variants being treated as equivalent epithets. If an epithet is established using initials of personal names these may not subsequently be spelled out in full.

8. Cultivar names should not be the same as the genus name

After 1 January 1996 cultivar epithets must not contain the Latin or common name of the genus to which the cultivar is assigned.

9. Within a genus cultivar names should not duplicate pre-existing names

Only in exceptional circumstances should cultivar epithets be re-used within a genus (or denomination class, or group of similar genera), nor should they be so similar to any existing epithet as to be likely to cause confusion. Nevertheless it is now permissible under the Cultivated Plant Code to re-use a cultivar epithet if this is unlikely to cause confusion and if the epithet has only rarely been used in publications. In addition the International Cultivar Registration Authority should be satisfied that the original cultivar:

1. is no longer in cultivation
2. has ceased to exist as breeding material
3. may not be found in gene or seed banks
4. is not a known component in the pedigree of other cultivars.

In the world of seed-testing and seed marketing legislation, cultivar epithets may be re-used if the original cultivar has not been in commercial existence for several years, even though it may still exist in genebanks or germplasm collections. To avoid confusion between cultivars with the same epithet, especially in databases, citation of a breeder's reference, application number or year of first registration is strongly recommended.

10. Group names follow similar rules to cultivar names

Epithets at the rank of Group are formed according to similar rules as cultivars. However, they should never be placed within single quotation marks and should always contain the word "Group" as the first or last word of the epithet (or its equivalent in other modern languages). Epithets for grex names, used in orchid nomenclature are formed in a similar way although there are several exceptions to their presentation. See the ICNCP for details.

Naming new plants

When people find an unusual seedling, raise a cross of their own or propagate a branch sport they often wonder how they can provide their plant with a cultivar name. The process is not a complicated one but before embarking upon it, it is important to ensure there is sufficient justification to establish a new name.

Distinct, Uniform and Stable

Firstly, you must be certain that the plant is yours to name. If it is not one that you have raised yourself then the right to name it may belong to someone else and, indeed, it may already have a name.

Secondly, make sure as far as possible that the plant is distinct and that there is not a very similar or identical plant which has already received a name.

Thirdly, it is a good idea to propagate the plant. If Plant Breeders' Rights are being applied for then a minimum of 10 plants will need to be propagated. It is important that all plants which share a cultivar name are uniform in their characteristics and remain stable in form when propagated.

Choosing a Name

If you intend to try to obtain Plant Breeders' Rights or any other form of intellectual property protection then it is important to check the relevant regulations for naming plants as some of these may be in conflict with the rules laid out in the ICNCP and will legally take priority over them.

If legal protection is not being sought then you need only ensure that your name does not contravene the requirements of the ICNCP.

Establishing your Name

Once you have settled on an acceptable name it is necessary to establish it so that if the name is subsequently applied to a different plant your use of the name will have priority.

To establish a cultivar name all that needs to be done is to list the name in a dated, printed publication accompanied by a description in a modern language. The description can be brief but it is of most use if it makes clear how the new cultivar differs from others. Many cultivars are first described in nursery catalogues but magazines, newsletters and other publications are equally valid as long as they are publicly distributed and generally available. Where a catalogue is only available online effective publication can still be made by printing off at least two copies and lodging them with a designated library.

Registration and Recording

Registering your name is one way to ensure that information about your plant is correctly recorded and that your chosen name is not duplicated in the future. The website at this link provides a list of genera and their appropriate International Cultivar Registration Authority (<http://www.ishs.org/sci/taxlist/taxlist.htm>).

In case the application of your name should become unclear in the future it is useful to have a permanent record of the appearance of your plant as you originally selected and this can be done by designating a nomenclatural standard.

Explanation of terms

Accepted name:

the correct name for any taxon, in accordance with the rules in the Codes of Nomenclature.

Article:

a collection of associated rules and recommendations in a Code of Nomenclature; rules are binding.

Author:

the person to whom a name or publication is attributed. The authors of plant names are sometimes referred to as "authorities".

Author abbreviation:

an abbreviated author's name used in an author citation, e.g. L. for Linnaeus.

Backcross:

a cross between a hybrid and one of its parents.

Basionym:

the original name in which an epithet was first published. The species epithet *non-scripta* was first applied to the English bluebell as *Scilla non-scripta*, which remains the basionym even though the species is now called *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*.

Binomial:

the scientific name of a species, consisting of two words. The first word is the name of the genus and the second is the epithet given to that species to distinguish it from others in the genus. In the binomial (species name) *Rosa canina*, *Rosa* is the genus name and *canina* is the species epithet.

Clone:

a number of genetically identical individuals resulting from asexual reproduction.

Code:

one of the International Codes of Nomenclature.

Common (vernacular) name:

the non-scientific name of a taxon in a modern language.

Conserved:

a name contrary to the rules in either Code may be conserved if adopted as correct by a ruling of the body responsible for such decisions.

Conspecific:

describes plants belonging to the same species.

Convar (convarietas):

an informal category for cultivated plants sometimes placed among the ranks of the taxonomic hierarchy. It is not recognised by either of the Codes of Nomenclature.

Cultigen:

a taxon believed to have originated in cultivation.

Cultivar:

a taxon of cultivated plants that is clearly distinct, uniform and stable in its characters and which, when propagated by appropriate means, retains those characters.

Cultivar epithet:

the final element of a full cultivar name, enclosed in single quotation marks to distinguish it from the scientific name that precedes it.

Denomination class:

a genus, species, Group or other taxon within which identical or similar cultivar names should not be used.

Diaeresis:

a diacritical sign (¨) placed over the second of two consecutive vowels to indicate that they are to be pronounced separately.

Diagnosis:

a short statement, usually in Latin, which specifically describes how a new taxon differs from similar, previously described taxa. Can stand in place of a full Latin description for a new taxon.

Effective publication:

(for names governed by the Botanical Code) publication in a printed, widely distributed, publicly available book or journal. Names governed by the Cultivated Plant Code are described as “published” if they appear in books, journals or trade catalogues.

Epithet:

the final element of a species, Group or cultivar name when considered alone. In the species name *Malva moschata*, the specific epithet is *moschata*; in the Group name *Solanum tuberosum* Maincrop Group, the Group epithet is Maincrop Group; in the cultivar name *Malva moschata* ‘Pink Perfection’, the cultivar epithet is ‘Pink Perfection’.

Establishment:

publication of a Group or cultivar name which is in accordance with the rules of the Cultivated Plant Code.

F1 hybrid:

the first generation resulting from crossing different plants or taxa; used more strictly in plant breeding for the result of a repeatable single cross between two pure-bred lines.

F2 hybrid:

a plant-breeding term for the result of self-pollination within an F1 population.

Family:

the main rank into which related genera are grouped.

Forma (f., plural formae):

the rank below varietas (variety) in the taxonomic hierarchy, often informally referred to as “form”.

Genus (plural genera):

the main rank between family and species in the taxonomic hierarchy.

Graft-chimaera:

a plant consisting of tissue from two or more species in intimate association resulting very infrequently from grafting.

Grex (gx, plural greges or informally grexes):

a special type of Group, now used exclusively in orchid nomenclature, applied to the progeny of an artificial cross between known parents.

Group:

a category governed by the Cultivated Plant Code encompassing plants (usually named cultivars) which share certain defined characters. A Group does not have to contain, or be solely composed of, cultivars.

Homonym:

when two or more taxa have been given the same scientific name, these names are described as homonyms. The first name published will normally have priority.

Hybrid:

the result of crossing different plants or taxa.

Hybrid formula:

the names of the parents of a hybrid linked by a multiplication sign, e.g. *Solanum nigrum* × *S. physalifolium*.

International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA):

an organisation or individual responsible for registering Cultivar and Group names for a particular taxon, usually a family, genus, species or other denomination class. There are for example ICRA's for conifers, *Orchidaceae*, *Narcissus*, *Rhododendron* and *Prunus mume*, among many others.

Legitimate name:

a name published in accordance with the rules set out in the Botanical Code.

Line:

a plant-breeding term used to describe plants resulting from self-fertilisation, inbreeding or repeated selection.

Nomenclatural standard:

a herbarium specimen, seed sample, illustration or other reference material to which the name of a cultivar or Group is permanently attached. Such material should be maintained to demonstrate the diagnostic characters of the cultivar in question.

Nomenclatural type:

under the Botanical Code a specimen on which the formal description of a taxon is based. This is usually a herbarium specimen and serves as the defining reference point for the correct application of the name in question.

Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR):

a form of intellectual property (IP) rights granted to the breeder of a new cultivar for a certain period, if the cultivar meets certain clearly defined criteria.

Plant Patent:

a form of intellectual property (IP) rights similar to Plant Breeders' Rights.

Plant Variety Rights (PVR):

a form of intellectual property (IP) rights similar to Plant Breeders' Rights.

Priority:

an important principle of nomenclature whereby the earliest valid publication of a name takes priority over later names.

Rank:

one of the hierarchical categories used in plant classification.

Registration:

the act of registering a Cultivar or Group name by the appropriate International Cultivar Registration Authority.

Selling name:

see Trade designation.

Sensu lato (s.l.):

in the broad sense.

Sensu stricto (s.s.):

in the narrow sense.

Series:

a collective category used as a marketing device, which usually (though by no means always) links morphologically similar plants differing in a single character such as flower or leaf colour. Being strictly commercial and often given trademarks, they are not governed by either Code of Nomenclature. Not to be confused with the botanical rank "series", an optional subdivision of genus.

Species (sp.; plural species, spp.):

the main rank below genus in the taxonomic hierarchy.

Species epithet:

the second part of a binomial, the first part being the genus.

Standard Portfolio:

the nomenclatural standard together with any additional material such as extra herbarium specimens or illustrations, descriptions, details of registration and parentage, nursery catalogues, and DNA data or samples.

Subspecies (subsp.):

the main rank below species in the taxonomic hierarchy.

Synonym:

a valid name for a taxon that is not currently accepted, usually through application of the Principle of Priority.

Taxon (plural taxa):

a taxonomic group at any rank, e.g. genus, species, subspecies, variety, Group or cultivar.

Trade designation:

a name used to market a plant when the original cultivar epithet is considered unsuitable for selling purposes; not recognised by either of the Codes of Nomenclature. Also known as a selling name.

Trademark:

a sign, usually made from words, letters, numbers or symbols, that identifies the goods of a particular enterprise, distinguishing them from the goods of its competitors.

Trinomial:

a binomial followed by a third epithet with no indication of its rank.

Type specimen:

see Nomenclatural type.

UPOV (Union Internationale pour la Protection des Obtentions Vegetales):

the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants is an intergovernmental organisation whose objective is the protection of new varieties (cultivars) of plants by intellectual property rights.

Valid name:

a name published in accordance with the rules set out in the Codes of Nomenclature.

Variant:

an informal term for a plant or group of plants which shows some character differences from others in the same taxon.

Varietas (var.):

the main rank between species and forma in the taxonomic hierarchy.

Variety:

an informal term for varietas (q.v.) but sometimes also used instead of cultivar. The distinction between varietas and cultivar is an important one.

Variety denomination:

a cultivar epithet designated by a statutory authority.