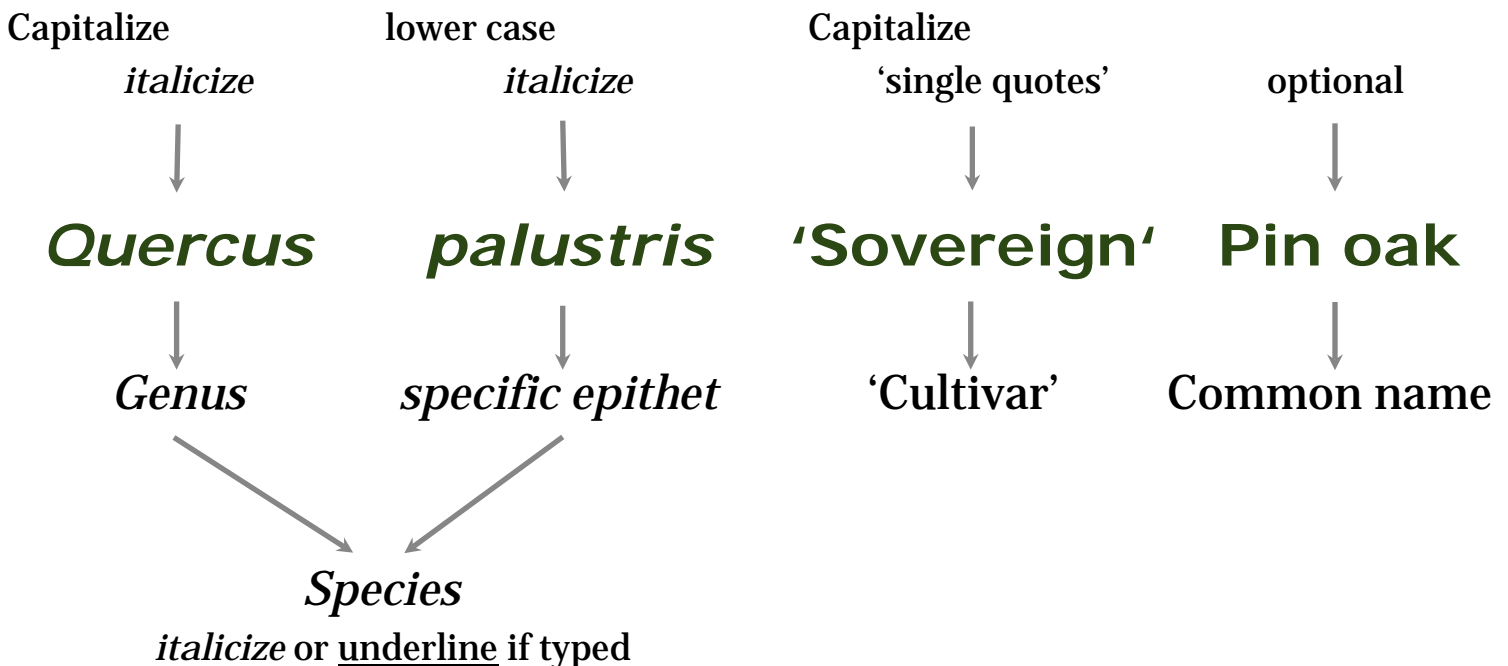


BOTANICAL NOMENCLATURE



THE GARDEN CLUB of AMERICA

To correctly identify your plant for exhibition in a GCA flower show, you need to know its botanical name. The use of the common name may cause confusion because it can vary by geographic location. Take, for example, *Liriodendron tulipifera*. It is commonly called Tulip Magnolia, Tulip Poplar, Yellow Poplar or Canary Whitewood depending on where you live. In addition, many plants do not have common names. Botanical names are established by the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature*. Here is how to write a botanical name correctly.



Botanical names are identified by two words, a genus and a species (a binomial system). A genus unites members within a family which share certain characteristics. Within a genus, individuals of a species share related characteristics. The species name (the epithet) is useful because it may describe some significant aspect of the plant, such as where the species came from originally, its growing habit, its type of leaf or flower color, etc. The genus and species words are derived from Greek, Latin or other sources (such as the name of the discoverer). The specific epithet *palustris* in *Quercus palustris*, for example, means "growing in the marsh," apt epithet for an oak that grows naturally in marshy or swampy conditions. If you are not certain of the specific epithet of your plant, write sp. for the species. The plural of genus is genera. The abbreviated plural for species is spp. (*Pelargonium* spp.).

A cultivar is a type of a plant developed from a naturally occurring species and/or hybrid that is maintained under cultivation. It must be distinct from the species—for example, bigger flowers, variegated foliage, different growth rate, etc. The naming of a cultivar should conform to the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants (the ICNCP, commonly known as the Cultivated Plant Code). In addition, the cultivar must be able to be reproduced reliably while maintaining its distinction from the species. If you do not know the cultivar name, write cv. for the cultivar. The abbreviated plural for cultivar is cvs.

Some plants, such as hybrid roses and daffodils, might not have specific epithets because so many crosses have been made over time. In cases like this, it is permissible to write the genus name followed by the cultivar name (*Rosa* 'Heritage').

Family names often are not required at flower shows. Family names, if asked for, usually end in –aceae and are not italicized. A genus name never ends in –aceae.

Subspecies (ssp.), variety (var.) or forma (f.) are used to distinguish naturally occurring variants of the species in the wild (*Cornus florida* var. *rubra*).

An interspecific cross, a cross between two species within a genus, is written with a lower case x between the genus and specific epithet, e.g. *Hamamelis* x *intermedia*. Intergeneric hybrids are produced by crossing individuals from two different genera, such as *Cupressus* and *Chamaecyparis* for the Leyland Cypress. This intergeneric hybrid is written as: X *Cupressocyparis leylandii*. Note: capital X for crosses of two genera placed before the genus name.

Trademarked cultivars, often indicated by the abbreviation TM after the trademarked name, should be written: *Echinacea* 'Evan Saul' SUNDOWN. *Echinacea* is the genus, 'Evan Saul' is the cultivar and SUNDOWN (all capital letters) is the trademarked name. Where plants are protected by trade names, both the trade name and the cultivar name should be listed. The nursery plant label will indicate whether the plant is a trademarked cultivar.

Botanical names of orchids have their own nomenclature. For more information, see "Exhibiting Orchids," by Susan W. Plimpton in TRD-The Real Dirt, Special Flower Show Edition for Horticulture, No. 9, and Spring 2008.

With advances in molecular biology, a number of genera are being reclassified, and botanical names can change. For current information, go to: <http://www.theplantlist.org> (The Plant List) or www.ipni.org (The International Plant Names Index). In addition, when searching for the most current nomenclature, you may encounter other older names, incorrect/discarded names or second choices (synonyms or syn.). The websites above will direct you to the most current accepted nomenclature (*Coleus hybridus* = *Plectranthus scutellaroides*).

To find botanical names, the general authorities for GCA flower shows are:

AHS A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants, The Plant List at www.theplantlist.org, International Plant Names Index at www.ipni.org or <http://www.internationalplantnames.com>, and Royal Horticultural Society plantfinder database <http://apps.rhs.org.uk/rhsplantfinder>.

If you do not know the botanical name for your plant, consult an arboretum, master gardener, GCA horticulture judge or expert in your club or zone in advance of the flower show.



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