

The Royal Horticultural Society

Botany Advisory Services

January 2004



Recommended Style for Printing Plant Names

Each year we receive numerous enquiries from publishers and others requesting guidance on how plant names should be printed. A glance at a selection of modern books shows that, while there is perhaps more uniformity of style than in older works, there are still different approaches to, for example, the names of cultivars (garden varieties) and common names.

Consistency of style in this respect is a worthwhile aim and the following notes, which represent the current stylistic policy of the RHS and many others, may be helpful.

BOTANICAL NAMES

The scientific name of a plant normally consists of two parts: its generic name (the name of the **genus**, plural **genera**) and its specific epithet. This forms the name of a **species**.

Note: the word *specie* has no validity in botany, *species* is both singular and plural.

- These names should always be printed in *italics* (underlined if handwritten or an italic font is not available).
- The generic name always has a capital initial letter.

Examples: *Primula*; *Pimelea*; *Sarcococca*

- The specific epithet should always have a lower case initial letter, even when derived from a person's name or when a noun.

Examples: *Primula vulgaris*; *Pimelea prostrata*; *Sarcococca hookeriana*

- In some cases, the epithet of a subspecies, botanical variety (*varietas*), or *forma* is also given. Subspecific and varietal epithets and those of *formae* are treated in the same way as specific epithets but the abbreviations **subsp.**, **var.** and **f.** are printed in Roman, not italics. Where known, the appropriate abbreviation should always be included to avoid any ambiguity.

Examples: *Primula vulgaris* subsp. *sibthorpii*; *Pimelea prostrata* f. *parvifolia*;
Sarcococca hookeriana var. *digyna*

Note: The term subspecies is sometimes abbreviated to *ssp.* but this is liable to be confused with *sp.*, the abbreviation for species (singular) or *spp.*, the abbreviation for species (plural). Therefore, *subsp.* is the preferred abbreviation for subspecies.

- Where the genus is quite clear from the context, it may be abbreviated to a single letter (eg: in a paragraph about roses, repetitions of *Rosa* may be shortened to *R.*); it is not good practice to abbreviate any other parts of a plant name, or to indicate the plural use of a generic name by doubling the initial letter (eg: *RR.* or *Rr.* for several species of *Rosa*).

AUTHORITIES

For precision when using plant names, it is helpful to include the **authority** for a name. This is the name of the person who gave the name to the plant. The author's name may be written out in full or abbreviated according to a standard list of abbreviations

and should be in Roman. When a name is changed, the author of the original name is placed in parenthesis and the new author added:

Examples: *Fragaria vesca* L. (named by Linnaeus)
Scilla socialis Bak. (named by Baker) was changed to
Ledebouria socialis (Bak.) Jessop (changed by Jessop!).

HYBRIDS

When plants of two species or more are crossed, the resultant seedlings are known as hybrids. A hybrid can be indicated by writing the names of the parents, in alphabetical order, linked by a multiplication sign (or a lower case 'x' in Roman if a multiplication sign is not available). This is a hybrid formula.

Examples: *Hebe elliptica* × *H. speciosa*;
Odontoglossum crispum × *O. harrayanum* × *Cochlioda noezliana*

- Many plants known to be hybrids are given new names. In hybrids between species of the same genus, the specific epithet is separated from the generic name by a multiplication sign (or 'x').

Example: *Hebe* × *franciscana* (*H. elliptica* × *H. speciosa*)

- In hybrids between species of different genera, the hybrid generic name is preceded by a multiplication sign.

Examples: × *Mahoberberis* (*Mahonia* × *Berberis*);
× *Citrofortunella* (*Citrus* × *Fortunella*);
× *Potinara* (*Brassavola* × *Cattleya* × *Laelia* × *Sophronitis*).

- Graft-chimaeras involving two genera are treated as cultivars but denoted by an addition sign preceding the new generic name.

Examples: + *Laburnocytisus* 'Adamii' (*Laburnum* + *Cytisus*);
+ *Crataegomespilus* 'Bronvaux' (*Crataegus* + *Mespilus*)

- Graft-chimaeras between species in the same genus can only be indicated by adding a hybrid formula after the name.

Example: *Aesculus* 'Dallimorei' (*A. flava* + *A. hippocastanum*).

- Orchid hybrids are often referred to by their parentage. To avoid writing out several long generic names, these are often reduced to a standard abbreviation.

Examples: × *Lc.* (× *Laeliocattleya*);
Paph. (*Paphiopedilum*);
× *Smbep.* (× *Schomboepidendrum*)

Note: Although there are many hybrid genera in the orchid family, it is common practice among orchid growers and in orchid literature to omit the multiplication sign. This can, unfortunately, cause confusion for those not familiar with orchid nomenclature.

CULTIVARS – GARDEN VARIETIES

New cultivar names must be coined in a modern language such as English, but many older ones are latinized and are therefore not always easily distinguished from botanical names. However, the style of printing cultivar names is quite different.

Cultivar names should always be printed in Roman type, each word with a capital initial letter (except for conjunctions, particles and prepositions) – even when latinized. They should be enclosed in single quotation marks (**never** double). Cultivar names consisting of a person's name with initials should include stops and a space between

the initials and the surname. Hyphenated names are treated as one word. Abbreviations require a stop; contractions do not.

Examples: *Potentilla fruticosa* 'Daydawn'; *Clematis* 'Belle Nantaise';
Crocasmia 'Jenny Bloom'; *Mahonia repens* 'Rotundifolia';
Tulipa 'Queen of Sheba'; *Erica* × *darleyensis* J.W. Porter';
Prunus mume 'Omoi-no-mama'; *Narcissus* 'St Keverne'

TRADE DESIGNATIONS

When plants are registered for Plant Breeders' Rights (PBR) under a code-name or have a cultivar name in a foreign language, they are often sold using an alternative name or a translation, both of which are termed **trade designations**. These are not regarded as direct equivalents of the cultivar name and should not be printed in the same way. A trade designation should always be quoted in tandem with the cultivar name (except where this is not known) and styled in a different font, without single quotation marks. Translation of cultivar names is to be discouraged and there is no necessity to use translations when the original is known.

Examples: PBR: *Rosa* RADIO TIMES 'Aussal'
Rosa MEMENTO
Fragaria PINK PANDA 'Frel'
Translation: *Potentilla fruticosa* MOONLIGHT 'Maanelys'
Hydrangea macrophylla BLUE PRINCE 'Blauer Prinz'

TRADEMARKS

Increasingly, plants are being sold using trade-marks as alternatives to or in addition to cultivar names. Strictly speaking, trade-marks should not be quoted without permission from the trade-mark holder, but in some cases there is no alternative name to use. Trade-marks are not cultivar names or trade designations but are best treated in the same way as trade designations with the addition of TM or ® as appropriate.

Examples: *Rosa* LA SEVILLANA® 'Meigekanu'
Rosmarinus SILVER SPIRESTM
Petunia SURFINIA® HOT PINK 'Marrose'

GREXES AND CULTIVAR-GROUPS

For cultivated orchids, use is made of grex names for plants sharing the same parentage, as well as cultivar names for individual clones. In other cases, assemblages of related or similar plants are placed in cultivar-groups. Both grex and group names are printed in Roman, with capital initial letters. The word Group is always part of group names, but the word grex or the abbreviation g. is now rarely used.

Examples: grex: *Cymbidium* Strathdon; × *Vuykstekeara* Cambria 'Plush'
group: *Hosta* Tardiana Group
Rhododendron (PJM Group) 'Rim Checkmate'
Polystichum setiferum (Divisilobum Group) 'Divisilobum Densum'

FAMILIES

The names of plant families should be printed in italics (or underlined) with a capital initial letter.

Examples: *Rosaceae*; *Berberidaceae*; *Compositae*

EXCEPTIONS

In certain circumstances, strict adherence to these guidelines could render particular forms of publication difficult to understand clearly through lack of contrast in the fonts required. Where plant names form important headings, especially in lists, it may, for instance, be more appropriate for clarity to use **capital letters** in a Roman font, which

will stand out more clearly.

Also, it is common for photographic captions to be printed in italics. If plant names are included, these should then be printed in Roman.

COMMON NAMES OF PLANTS

Unlike botanical and cultivar names, common names are governed by no international rules. However, our recommendation is to print them always in Roman type, with lower case initial letters except when the word is a geographical or personal name. This applies also when the scientific name is used as the common name and if the scientific name is turned into a plural.

Examples: potato; good King Henry; rhododendrons; camellia; Jersey lily; proteas

- A common name can be combined with a cultivar name in place of a generic name where the context allows.

Examples: potato 'Cara'; lily 'Enchantment'; rose 'Excelsa'

FURTHER READING

The rules governing the formation of plant names are to be found in:

- GREUTER, W. *et al* (ed.) (1994). *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (Tokyo Code)*. Koeltz Scientific Books, Königstein.
- TREHANE, R.P. *et al* (ed.) (1995). *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants, 1995*. Quarterjack Publishing, Wimborne.
- GREATWOOD, J. *et al*. (1993). 4th edition. *Handbook on Orchid Nomenclature and Registration*. Royal Horticultural Society/International Orchid Commission, London.

Four useful references with generally reliable nomenclature are:

- BRICKELL, C.D. (ed.) (1996). *A-Z Encyclopedia of Garden Plants*. Dorling Kindersley, London.
- BRICKELL, C.D. (ed.) (1994). 2nd edition. *Gardeners' Encyclopaedia of Plants and Flowers*. Dorling Kindersley, London.
- LORD, W.A. (ed.) (Published annually). *The RHS Plant Finder*. Dorling Kindersley, for the Royal Horticultural Society.
- TREHANE, R.P. (1989). *Index Hortensis* (Volume 1: Perennials). Quarterjack Publishing, Wimborne.

The RHS Plant Finder aims to provide an up-to-date and stable nomenclature for garden plants and its names are regularly reviewed.



Compiled by the Staff
of Horticultural Society Garden
Wisley Woking Surrey GU23 6QB
Email: advisory@rhs.org.uk
Website: www.rhs.org.uk

The mention of any product, supplier or service does not constitute an endorsement by the Society.
©RHS – not to be copied or reproduced without prior permission.