WHAT'S IN A NAME?

USEFUL DEFINITIONS

Learn some vocabulary to help you read plant labels.

Components of a scientific name

- **Genus name**
- **Specific epithet**

Achillea millefolium

- **Genus name**
- **Specific epithet**

Example:

- **Genus name**: Achillea
- **Specific epithet**: millefolium

Components of a scientific name

- **Genus name**
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Achillea millefolium

- **Genus name**: Achillea
- **Specific epithet**: millefolium

Guide created by Jen J-M. Hayes (2023)

Straight Species

A plant species that has not been bred or modified in any way. These plants should look exactly like a plant of the same species growing in the wild (i.e., a wild-type). A straight species is not necessarily a native plant, or harvested from a local population.

Example: Achillea millefolium

Subspecies

A plant population geographically isolated from others of the same species. Denoted with 'ssp.' between the species and subspecies name.

Example: Achillea millefolium ssp. lanulosa

Variety

A variety is a naturally occurring form of a plant population within a species, such as a white-flowered form of a normally pink-flowered plant. Varieties are denoted with 'var.' between the species and variety name.

Example: Achillea millefolium var. occidentalis

Cultivar

Cultivar = cultivated variety. Cultivars are plant forms developed by humans, rather than those that are naturally occurring. Sometimes cultivars are developed from naturally occurring varieties, but they are bred to be distinct, uniform, and stable, and they are also named. A cultivar name is listed in single quotation marks following the scientific name of a plant.

Example: Achillea millefolium 'Calistoga'

Hybrid Cultivar

Hybrids are plants with parents from 2+ different species or genera. Like cultivars, hybrid cultivars have a name listed in single quotation marks, but they typically only have the genus listed before the cultivar name. Some hybrid cultivars have an 'x' in their name.

Example: Achillea 'Moonshine'

Ecotype

A plant that is adapted to grow in a specific ecological region. Its form, function, and growth habits are well adapted to the place where it grows. For example, if you're planting in eastern Oregon, you might seek out an eastern yarrow ecotype, as it will be better adapted to the climate, compared to one grown on the Oregon coast.

Want more information on how to identify and buy native plants?

Scan here!
WHAT'S IN A NAME? READING PLANT LABELS

Learn how to identify a few common plant types sold at nurseries and garden stores.

Achillea millefolium

Plant type: Straight Species
How to tell: The plant’s scientific name (genus & specific epithet) is listed, without any other names in single quotation marks.

Achillea millefolium ‘Calistoga’

Plant type: Cultivar
How to tell: The plant’s scientific name (genus & specific epithet) is followed by a name in single quotation marks (‘Calistoga’).

Achillea millefolium ‘Moonshine’

Plant type: Hybrid Cultivar
How to tell: Only the plant’s genus is listed, followed by a name in single quotation marks (‘Moonshine’).

WESTERN YARROW Achillea millefolium var. occidentalis
Open Pollinated Seed

Plant type: Variety
How to tell: The plant’s scientific name is followed by “var.” and a variety name listed in italics.

YARROW Achillea millefolium ssp. lanulosa
Open Pollinated Seed

Plant type: Subspecies
How to tell: The plant’s scientific name is followed by “ssp.” and a subspecies name listed in italics.

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Photographs by Jen J-M. Hayes