

April 2007: 30 Days of Green

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

April is National Garden Month® — When you garden, you GROW!

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April 3

giardino

jardin

сад

κήπος

Speaking of GARDENS

jardim

tuin

Garten

Would a rose by any other name really smell as sweet?



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background Today there are about 5,000 languages spoken across the globe, and languages are considered cultural treasures. But for people who are trying to share information across cultures, a common language is necessary. This is why eighteenth-century scientist Carl Linnaeus developed a universal system of naming plants and animals. Although his system has changed over time to meet the changing needs of science, we still use this system today and recognize Linnaeus as the Father of Taxonomy (term for the science of classification, or sorting things into groups). In this system, organisms are grouped by similar characteristics and placed into a hierarchy based on those similarities. Currently the hierarchy goes like this:

Kingdom | Division | Class | Order | Family | Genus | Species

As each organism is classified it is given a unique two-part genus-species name.

To put it in a familiar perspective, a genus name is similar to your family's last name, and the species name is similar to a first name. For instance, all oaks share the same genus name: *Quercus*, but each tree species has a different species name. As an example, red oak is *Quercus rubra*, and live oak is *Quercus virginiana*.

When it comes to naming plants, scientific names are essential even when people speak the same language, because a single plant can have a number of "common names" that have been assigned to it over the centuries: for instance, a common spring wildflower is known by different people as dogtooth violet, adder's tongue, or trout lily, but under Linnaeus' system, it is known by a single name: *Erythronium americanum*.



Dogtooth violet... or adders' tongue... or trout lily. Better yet, *Erythronium americanum*.

These scientific names are created from Latin words. Because Latin, the historical language of the Romans, is a "dead" language that is no longer spoken by a culture, it doesn't evolve like languages spoken on an everyday basis. The consistency and simplicity of Linnaeus' system has allowed it to survive over hundreds of years and provide a common "code" so that scientists — and gardeners — can be sure they're referring to the same organisms, whatever languages they speak.

Scientific names sound confusing, but they really just provide a description of

activity

Investigate different languages spoken in your area. Begin by brainstorming a list of common nature words, then search for community members to translate the words into different language.

French — *jardin*

Italian — *giardino*

Spanish — *jardín*

Portuguese — *jardim*

If you can't find translators, take advantage of online translation services such as:

[Babel Fish Translation](#)

[Google Language Tools](#)

the plant. If you spend time getting to know plants' scientific names, you'll begin to recognize patterns, and the meanings of Latin words.

Here's a list of common Latin words used in scientific names, and their definitions.

grandiflora — large (grand-) flowered (flora)
macrophylla — large (macro) leaved (phylla)
macrocarpa — large (macro) fruited (carpa)
stellata — starry
hypoleuca — white (leuca) underneath (hypo)
alba — white
rubra — red

Here are plants whose names include these words:

| Scientific name | Common name | Description |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>Magnolia grandiflora</i> | Southern Magnolia | a magnolia with very large flowers |
| <i>Magnolia macrophylla</i> | Bigleaf Magnolia | a magnolia with large leaves |
| <i>Magnolia stellata</i> | Star Magnolia | a magnolia with a starburst of flower |
| <i>Magnolia hypoleuca</i> | Whitebark Magnolia | bark has a white appearance |
| <i>Quercus macrocarpa</i> | Bur Oak | oak with very large acorns |
| <i>Quercus alba</i> | White Oak | oak with light colored wood |
| <i>Quercus rubra</i> | Red Oak | oak with wood with a reddish hue |



Star magnolia



Scarlet flax, *Linum rubrum*;
rubrum = red in Latin

What is the take-home message? Language is an important tool that separates humans from all other life forms. Using a common language to talk about scientific topics has made an important impact by allowing scientists to share their knowledge.

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