

April 27, 2016



What's In a Name?

By Sue McDavid

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Novice gardeners and many times, veteran gardeners as well, are confused by all the scientific names of plants. Botanical names are a bit like legalese -- confusing, but necessary to accurately describe a plant because in many cases, a plant's common name can be misleading. For instance, if going to a garden nursery and inquiring if Daisies are available for sale, you may be met with a perplexed expression and then asked, which Daisy? That is because the term Daisy is used for several very different plants: *Leucanthemum x superbum* is a Shasta Daisy, *Tanacetum coccineum* is a Painted Daisy, *Brachyscome iberidifolia* is a Swan River Daisy, *Rudbeckia hirta* is a Gloriosa Daisy and so on. It's not hard to understand the confusion about names given all these terms, and our main mission as UCCE Master Gardeners is to educate the home gardener. Therefore, the following terms may help to clarify what all different parts of a plant name mean.

The first word in a botanical name is the genus name and the second word is the species which is usually a descriptive name for a person or a place. For example, *Ceanothus lemmonii* (Lemmon's Ceanothus) is named for Mr. or Mrs. Lemmon who found or first described this plant. The genus and species names are always italicized with only the genus name being capitalized. Common names are always within parentheses and capitalized.

It gets a little trickier with the terms variety and cultivar. Varieties often occur in nature and if grown from seed, they will usually have the same unique characteristics of the parent plant. Cultivars on the other hand do not necessarily grow "true." This means that if grown from seed, they may or may not look like the parent plant. A cultivar is a plant that is "human-made" and must be vegetatively propagated through cuttings or division to look like the parent plant. A plant's cultivar name is always capitalized and written between single quotation marks.

Therefore, if going to a garden nursery to locate a *Spiraea japonica* 'Limemound' (Japanese Spirea), you'll really wow the personnel by your knowledge of proper botanical names.

This Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to noon is a free class: Water Efficient Gardening. Master Gardener and retired meteorologist Steve Savage will explore the effects of soils, fertilizing, and

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mulch on water use; when to water; creating hydro-zones; how to conserve water and more. Class is at the Government Center Hearing Room, Building C, 2850 Fairlane Drive in Placerville.

Master Gardeners will teach free mini-classes and be available to talk to home gardeners at this weekend's Home and Garden Show in the El Dorado County Fairgrounds, Placerville. You will also find Master Gardeners at the Cameron Park Community Center on Saturday, April 30, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. for the Spring Antique Craft and Garden Show.

The Sherwood Demonstration Garden is open to the public from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Come see the wonderful variety of plants, shrubs and trees that can be grown in our county. Located behind Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center, 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville. (College fee of @2.00 for parking on weekdays only.)

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.