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# DICTIONARY OF PLANT NAMES

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The pronunciation,  
derivation and meaning of botanical  
names, and their common-name  
equivalents



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Allen J. Coombes

**Timber Press**  
**DICTIONARY OF**  
**PLANT NAMES**



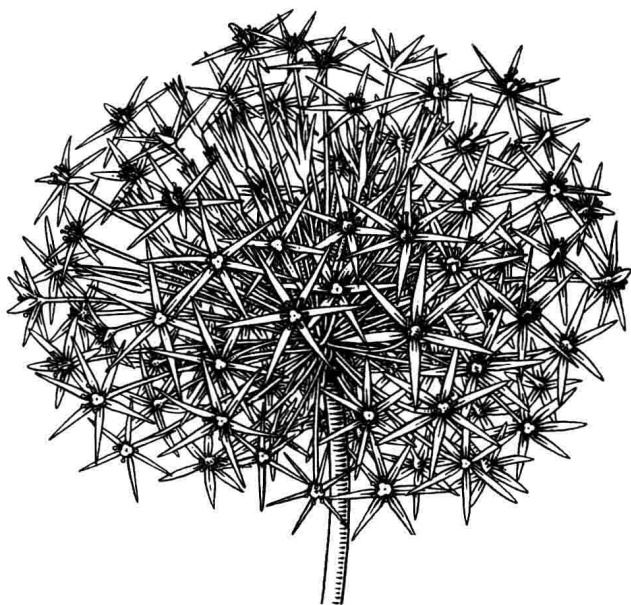
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## Introduction

The aim of this book is to provide a guide to the derivation, meaning and pronunciation of the scientific names of the more commonly grown plants. The term scientific name is preferable here to Latin name as many names derive from languages other than Latin, for example many derive from Greek or personal names. Whatever their origin, all names are treated as Latin. Generic names are treated as nouns and, as in Latin, have a gender (i.e. masculine, feminine or neuter). Names of species and varieties are adjectival and their endings follow the rules of Latin grammar, e.g. the Latin word for white can be rendered as *albus* (masculine), *alba* (feminine) or *album* (neuter) depending on the gender of the generic name. The use of Latin for plant names can certainly be confusing when first encountered, producing many words of unfamiliar form and uncertain pronunciation. It should be remembered, however, that when a scientific attitude was first taken towards the naming of plants in the 16th and 17th centuries, Latin was a common language among the intellectuals of Europe and it was second nature for many to use it. Today, although Latin has evolved from the Latin used in classical and medieval times to meet the needs of botany it forms a method of communication between botanists of all nationalities.

### How to use this book

Generic names and common names are listed alphabetically. The name of each genus (plural genera) is given first e.g. **Acer**, followed by the suggested pronunciation, the family in which it is placed (related genera are placed in the same family) and the derivation of the name, whether from Latin (L.), Greek (Gk.) or other sources. Following this is a short statement of the main use in gardens of the plants listed e.g. as herbaceous perennials, shrubs, etc. and a general guide to hardiness. It should be noted that these are general statements about the genus as represented in gardens and some of the plants listed may be exceptions. Usually, unless otherwise stated, plants are at least fairly hardy in many parts of the country, semi-hardy plants require winter protection in most areas and tender plants are generally only suitable for growing under cover or for summer bedding. A common name is given if it is applied to the whole genus. If a country of



origin is given here it applies to the plants listed and not necessarily to the whole genus.

Species are listed alphabetically under each genus. Each name is followed by the suggested pronunciation, the meaning of the name, the common name (if any) and the country of origin unless this is given above. If, instead of a country of origin, the abbreviation cult. (cultivated) is given this indicates that this plant is known only in gardens.

Categories below the rank of species are listed under the relevant specific name. These include those recognised botanically (sub-species, varieties and forms) which are given in small letters (e.g. *Pinus nigra maritima*) and those recognised horticulturally (cultivars and groups). A cultivar is a form of a species or hybrid selected either in the wild or in cultivation and maintained in gardens. These are given with capital initials and single inverted commas e.g. *Hedera hibernica* 'Deltoidea'. Plants which form part of a variable group are given a group name which is given with capital initials but without inverted commas e.g. *Fagus sylvatica* Purpurea.

Common names are cross referenced to the correct scientific name and are given in Roman type. They are not listed if they are the same as or very similar to the generic name.

Hybrids arise both in the wild and in cultivation when two species cross or are crossed to give rise to a distinct plant. When the parents are in different genera the plant is known as an intergeneric hybrid and the 'generic' name is preceded by a multiplication sign e.g.  $\times$  *Laeliocattleya*. When the parents are in the same genus the 'specific' name is preceded by a multiplication sign e.g. *Abutilon*  $\times$  *suntense*. Names of graft-hybrids are preceded by a plus sign. Sometimes when parentage is complex or unknown, or a scientific name has not been given to the plant, it is more convenient to place the cultivar or group name of a hybrid directly under the generic name e.g. *Rhododendron* Loderi. Parents of hybrids are given where known. The hybrids listed are found only in cultivation unless otherwise stated.

A synonym is a scientific name that is no longer accepted for the plant in question. It may be that the name has been mis-applied in gardens and that the plant grown under this name is really something else (e.g. *Helichrysum microphyllum*); it may be that a name has been rejected because there

is an earlier name available for the same plant (e.g. *Magnolia conspicua*), or it may be that a plant is better placed in a different genus (e.g. *Alyssum maritimum*). Synonyms are cross-referenced unless they occur in the same genus and there are less than ten entries in that genus; they are indicated by an equation sign =. The abbreviation hort. (*hortorum*, of gardens) following a name means that the plant is known under that name in gardens but there may be another plant to which that name correctly applies.

Allen J. Coombes

## Pronunciation

Unlike the use of scientific names, their pronunciation is not governed by rules. The majority of people who use scientific names treat them as if they are in their own language. Where pronunciation is ambiguous by this method, it is common to encounter several ways of saying a word. Ideally pronunciation should be based on the origin of the word in question. Thus names derived from Latin or Greek should be given a Latin pronunciation, names derived from personal or place names should follow the original pronunciation of that name with a Latin pronunciation for any endings, changing the position of stress where necessary. The following table illustrates the classical pronunciation of Latin letters and diphthongs which are often said differently when an English pronunciation is given to the word. It should only be applied to words of Latin or Greek origin.

<i>Latin letter or diphthong</i>	<i>Classical pronunciation</i>
<i>a</i>	Short <i>a</i> is variously given as either in <i>cat</i> or in <i>above</i> . Long <i>a</i> as in <i>rather</i> , never as in <i>gate</i> .
<i>ae</i>	As <i>i</i> in <i>mite</i> .
<i>au</i>	As <i>ou</i> in <i>out</i> .
<i>c</i>	Always hard as in <i>cat</i> .
<i>e</i>	Short <i>e</i> as in <i>let</i> , long <i>e</i> as <i>a</i> in <i>gate</i> .
<i>ei</i>	As <i>a</i> in <i>gate</i> .
<i>eu</i>	As <i>oy</i> in <i>boy</i> .
<i>g</i>	Always hard as in <i>gate</i> .
<i>i</i>	Short <i>i</i> as in <i>tin</i> , long <i>i</i> as <i>ee</i> in <i>keen</i> .
<i>j</i>	As <i>y</i> in <i>yes</i> .
<i>s</i>	As in <i>this</i> , not as in <i>those</i> .
<i>u</i>	Short <i>u</i> as in <i>full</i> , long <i>u</i> as <i>oo</i> in <i>shoot</i> , never as in <i>tub</i> .
<i>v</i>	Classically pronounced as <i>w</i> .
<i>y</i>	Occurs in words of Greek origin and was pronounced as the French <i>u</i> .

Each scientific name is followed by a suggested pronunciation. This is often not the same as the English pronunciation of the name but does not necessarily conform to a complete classical pronunciation. Each word is divided into symbols, each symbol representing one syllable. The stressed syllable is given in *italics*. The pronunciation of each symbol is as in English, with the ambiguous letters being explained in the following table. For a normal English pronunciation, the scientific name can be pronounced as if it were English, for a more classical pronunciation consult the table on p. 10 for words of Latin or Greek origin.

<i>Symbol or letter</i>	<i>Pronounce as in</i>
<i>a</i>	apart, canal
<i>ă</i>	cat
<i>e</i>	let
<i>ew</i>	few
<i>ewr</i>	pure
<i>g</i>	gate
<i>i</i>	in
<i>ie</i>	kite
<i>j</i>	jam
<i>o</i>	hot
<i>ō</i>	note
<i>oi</i>	usually as <i>oy</i> in boy but classically as <i>o-i</i>
<i>our</i>	French <i>pour</i>
<i>ow</i>	how
<i>s</i>	this
<i>th</i>	<i>thin</i>
<i>tH</i>	<i>this</i>
<i>u</i>	full
<i>ū</i>	tub
<i>zh</i>	French <i>je</i>

# Glossary

The use of technical terms has been kept to a minimum but some have been used for brevity and accuracy. These are defined below.

acuminate	Tapered to a long point.	graft-hybrid	A plant which originated when one plant was grafted onto a different one. The tissues combine to create a different plant although there is no mixing of the genes.
anther	The portion of the stamen (q.v.) which bears the pollen.		
areole	In cacti a cluster of spines.		
auricle	An ear-like lobe.		
awn	A bristle-like tip.	indusium	in ferns, the covering of the sorus.
bi-pinnate	Twice pinnate, i.e. pinnate (q.v.) with the divisions pinnate.	inflorescence	The arrangement of individual flowers on a stem.
bract	A leaf-like structure beneath a flower or group of flowers.	involucre	A whorl of bracts beneath an inflorescence.
carpel	Part of the female portion of a flower consisting of an ovary (or part of one) and stigma.	linear	Narrow, with parallel sides.
		lip	In orchids, a modified petal.
		monocarpic	Fruiting once then dying.
column	In orchids, the combined style and stigma.	mucronate	With a short, abrupt point.
compound	Consisting of several parts.	node	A point on the stem bearing one or more leaves.
corolla	The part of the flower made up of the petals.	obovate	Egg-shaped in outline, broadest above the middle.
corymb	A type of raceme (q.v.) with the flowers at more or less the same height making a rounded or flat-topped inflorescence.	ovate	Egg-shaped in outline, broadest below the middle.
		panicle	A raceme (q.v.) with the branches branched.
dioecious	Bearing male and female flowers on separate plants.	pappus	A tuft of hairs or bristles on the fruit.
disc	An organ at the base of the ovary.	pedicel	The stalk of a single flower in an inflorescence.
entire	Not lobed or toothed.	peltate	With the stalk of a leaf inserted below the blade and not on the margin.
epiphytic	A plant growing non-parasitically on another one.	perianth	The part of a flower comprising the petals and sepals, generally used when they are similar.
filament	The stalk of the stamen on which the anther is borne.		
glabrous	Without hairs.	petiole	The leaf stalk.
glaucous	With a blue-grey bloom.	phyllode	A leaf-like structure consisting of a flattened petiole.

pinna (plural pinnae)	The primary division of a pinnate leaf.	spadix	Unstalked flowers densely arranged on a fleshy stem.
pinnule	The secondary division of a bi-pinnate leaf.	spathe	A large bract surrounding an inflorescence.
pistil	The female part of a flower.	sporangium (plural sporangia)	A capsule containing spores.
pollinium (plural pollinia)	A mass of pollen grains transported as a whole during pollination.	stamen	The male part of a flower consisting of an anther and a filament.
proliferous	Reproducing vegetatively.	strobilus	A cone.
pseudobulb	The thickened stem of an orchid.	style	The female part of a flower which bears the pollen-receiving organ (stigma) at its tip.
raceme	An inflorescence bearing single, stalked flowers from a central axis, the youngest at the apex.	type specimen	A specimen from which a plant was originally described and which defines the application of the name given.
receptacle	The apex of a flower stem on which the floral parts are borne.	umbel	An inflorescence in which the individual flower stalks all arise from one point at the apex of the stem, sometimes compound and then with the primary stalks bearing umbels.
scape	A leafless flower stalk.		
sepal	The parts of the perianth outside of the petals.		
sessile	Unstalked.		
simple	Not divided or lobed.		
sorus (plural sori)	A cluster of sporangia (q.v.).		

# DICTIONARY OF PLANT NAMES



## A

**Aaron's Beard** see *Hypericum calycinum*.

**Aaron's Rod** see *Verbascum thapsus*.

**Abele** see *Populus alba*.

**Abelia** a-bel-ee-a *Caprifoliaceae*. After Dr Clarke Abel (1780–1826) who introduced *A. chinensis*. Deciduous and evergreen shrubs.

*chinensis* chin-en-sis. Of China.

*engleriana* eng-gla-ree-ah-na. After Heinrich Engler (1844–1930). China.

*floribunda* flō-ri-bun-da. Profusely flowering. Mexico.

× *grandiflora* grān-di-flō-ra. *A. chinensis* × *A. uniflora*. Large-flowered.

*schumannii* shoo-mahn-ee-ee. After K. M. Schumann (1851–1904), German botanist. C China.

*triflora* tri-flō-ra. Three-flowered, the flowers are in clusters of three. Himalaya.

**Abeliophyllum** a-bel-ee-ō-fil-lum *Oleaceae*.

From *Abelia* q.v. and Gk. *phyllon* (a leaf) referring to the similar leaves. Deciduous shrub.

*distichum* dis-tik-um. Two-ranked (the leaves). Korea.

**Abelmoschus** ā-bel-mos-kus *Malvaceae*.

From Arabic *abu-l-mosk* (father of musk) referring to the musk-scented seeds. Tender annuals.

*esculentus* es-kew-len-tus. Edible (the fruit).

Ladies' Fingers, Okra. Tropical Asia.

*manihot* mah-nee-hot. From *manioc* the Brazilian name for cassava (*Manihot esculenta*). China.

**Abies** ā-bee-ayz *Pinaceae*. The classical name. Evergreen conifers. Fir.

*alba* āl-ba. White (the bark of old trees).

European Silver Fir. C and S Europe.

*amabilis* a-mah-bi-lis. Beautiful. Red Silver Fir. Pacific Silver Fir. NW United States.

*balsamea* bāl-sām-ee-a. Balsam-producing (the bark). Balsam Fir. Canada, E United States.

*bracteata* brāk-tee-ah-ta. With bracts (on the cone scales) conspicuous in this species. Santa Lucia Fir. California.

*cephalonica* kef-a-lon-i-ka. Of Cephalonia (now Kefallinia) a Greek Island. Greek Fir. SE Europe

**Abies** (continued)

*concolor* kon-ko-lor. Of the same colour (the leaf surfaces). White Fir. SW United States.

*delavayi* del-a-vay-ee. After its discoverer the Abbé Jean Marie Delavay (1838–95), French missionary in China who introduced many notable plants to cultivation. China.

*forrestii* fo-rest-ee-ee. After its discoverer and introducer George Forrest (1873–1932), a Scottish plant collector who made several expeditions to China. China.

*grandis* grān-dis. Large. Giant Fir. W N America.

*homolepis* ho-mō-lep-is. With similar scales (on the cone). Nikko Fir. Japan.

*koreana* ko-ree-ah-na. Of Korea. Korean Fir. S Korea.

*lasiocarpa* lā-see-ō-kar-pa. With rough cones. Alpine Fir. W N America.

*magnifica* mahg-ni-fi-ka. Magnificent. Red Fir. W United States.

*nordmanniana* nord-mahn-ee-ah-na. After its discoverer Alexander von Nordmann (1803–66), German botanist. Caucasian Fir. Caucasus, W Asia.

*pindrow* pin-drō. The native name. W Himalaya.

*procera* prō-kay-ra. Tall. Noble Fir. W United States.

*spectabilis* spek-tah-bi-lis. Spectacular. Himalayan Fir. Himalaya.

*squamata* skwah-mah-ta. Flaking (the bark). Flaky Fir. China.

**Abronia** a-brō-nee-a *Nyctaginaceae*. From Gk. *abros* (delicate) referring to the bracts. Annual herb.

*umbellata* um-bel-lah-ta. The flowers appear to be in umbels. Pink Sand Verbena. W N America.

**Abutilon** a-bew-ti-lon *Malvaceae*. From the Arabic name for a similar plant. Tender and semi-hardy shrubs.

*hybridum* hort. *hib*-rid-um. Hybrid. Name used for various hybrids.

*insigne* in-sig-nee. Remarkable. Colombia, Venezuela.

*megapotamicum* meg-a-pot-ām-ik-um. From near the Rio Grande, Brazil



**Abutilon** (continued)

× *milleri* mil-la-ree. *A. megapotamicum* × *A. pictum*. After Philip Miller (1691–1771) curator of Chelsea Physic Garden.

*pictum* pik-tum. (= *A. striatum*). Painted (the flowers). Brazil.

× *suntense* sūn-ten-see. *A. ochsenii* × *A. vitifolium*. From Sunte House, Sussex where it was raised in 1967.

*vitifolium* vee-ti-fo-lee-um. *Vitis*-leaved. Chile.

**Abyssinian Feathertop** see *Pennisetum villosum*.

**Acacia** a-kay-see-a or classically a-kah-kee-a *Leguminosae*. Gk. name for *A. arabica* from *akis* (a sharp point) referring to the thorns. Tender and semi-hardy evergreen trees and shrubs. Wattle.

*baileyana* bay-lee-ah-na. After F. M. Bailey (1827–1915) Australian botanist.

Cootamundra Wattle. New South Wales. *cultriformis* cul-tree-form-is. Knife-shaped (the phyllodes). Knife Acacia. E Australia. *dealbata* dee-al-bah-ta. Whitened (the young shoots and leaves). Silver Wattle. SE Australia.

*farnesiana* far-nee-ee-ah-na. From the garden of the Farnese Palace, Rome. Tropical America.

*longifolia* long-gi-fo-lee-a. With long leaves (phyllodes). Sydney Golden Wattle. Australia.

*melanoxylon* mel-a-noks-i-lon. With black wood. Blackwood. S Australia, Tasmania.

*mucronata* mew-kron-ah-ta. Mucronate (the phyllodes). Victoria, Tasmania.

*podalyriifolia* pōd-a-li-ree-i-fo-lee-a. With leaves (phyllodes) like *Podalyria* (S African shrub). Pearl Acacia. NE Australia.

*pravissima* prah-vis-im-a. Very crooked (the phyllodes). Ovens Wattle. SE Australia.

*riceana* ries-ee-ah-na. After Mr T. Spring-Rice, Chancellor of the Exchequer 1835–9. Rice's Wattle. Tasmania.

*verticillata* ver-tik-il-lah-ta. Whorled (the phyllodes). Star Acacia, Prickly Moses. Victoria, Tasmania.

**Acaena** a-see-na or classically a-kie-na *Rosaceae*. From Gk. *akaina* (a thorn) referring to the spiny fruits. Herbaceous perennials and sub-shrubs. New Zealand Burr.

*adscendens* ād-send-enz. Ascending (the branches from procumbent stems). New Zealand.

**Acaena** (continued)

*buchananii* bew-kān-ān-ee-ee. After John Buchanan (1819–98), botanist with the Geological Survey in New Zealand. New Zealand, Australia.

*inermis* in-er-mis. Not spiny. New Zealand. *microphylla* mik-rō-fi-la. Small-leaved. New Zealand.

*novae-zeelandiae* no-vie-zee-lahn-dee-ie. Of New Zealand.

**Acalypha** ā-ka-lee-fa *Euphorbiaceae*. Classical name for the nettle from the similar leaves. Tender shrubs.

*hispidula* his-pid-a. Bristly. Chenille Plant, Red-hot Cat's Tail. Malay Archipelago. *wilkesiana* wilks-ee-ah-na. After Admiral Charles Wilkes (1798–1877), American explorer of the Pacific. Pacific Islands.

**Acantholimon** a-kānth-ō-lee-mon

*Plumbaginaceae*. From Gk. *akanthos* (a thorn) and *limonium* (sea lavender). Spiny sub-shrubs. Prickly Thrift.

*glumaceum* gloo-mah-kee-um. Having glumes, the papery bracts around the flowers. Caucasus, W Asia.

*olivieri* o-liv-ee-e-ree. After G. A. Olivier (1756–1814) French naturalist. Iran.

*ulicinum* ew-li-kee-num. (= *A. androsaceum*). Like *Ulex*. SE Europe, W Asia.

*creticum* kray-ti-kum. (= *A. creticum*). of Crete. Crete, W Asia.

*venustum* ven-us-tum. Charming. W. Asia.

**Acanthopanax** a-kānth-ō-pān-āks *Araliaceae*. From Gk. *akanthos* (a thorn) and *Panax* a related genus from *panakes* (a panacea) referring to the medicinal properties of *Panax ginseng*. Spiny shrubs.

*henryi* hen-ree-ee. After Augustine Henry, see *Illicium henryi*. Japan.

*sieboldianus* see-bōld-ee-ah-nus. After Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866), German doctor who introduced and named many Japanese plants. China, Japan.

**Acanthus** a-kānth-us *Acanthaceae*. From Gk. *akanthos* (a thorn) referring to the often spiny leaves and flower bracts. Perennial herbs. Bear's Breeches.

*hungaricus* hun-gah-ri-kus. (= *A. balcanicus*. *A. longifolius*). Of Hungary. SE Europe.

*mollis* mol-lis. Soft, the leaves are not spiny. SW Europe.