

Plant Names: Clear and Telling or Confusing

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Two common plant naming errors appear in print and in nursery catalogs more and more frequently. The correct use and supporting rationale is presented:

1. The common name is crapemyrtle, not crape myrtle. Why? Because it is in the genus *Lagerstroemia* and in the Lythraceae plant family, and not in the genus *Myrtus* which is in the Myrtaceae family. It is simply a plant that LOOKS somewhat remotely like a myrtle. On the other hand, the Greek myrtle, *Myrtus communis* is a true myrtle and appropriately, the common name is two words. Standardized Plant Names, in the preface on page VII, provides further insights on this topic. "In the case of compound names in which a name properly belonging to one genus is applied in compound to a different genus, like horsechestnut or mayapple, failure to write or print them as compound words, either with a hyphen or solid is in many cases likely to cause serious confusion and should be consistently avoided. The committee prefers and prints mayapple. It makes no serious objection to may-apple. It objects very positively to may apple, which is apt to mean, for anyone not familiar with the plant, that it is a species or variety of the genus *Malus*". Clearly horsechestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, is not a chestnut, *Castanea* but simply bears some resemblance and mayapple, *Podophyllum*, is not an apple and is not in the genus *Malus*, but does produce a fruit that somewhat resembles an apple. And, there are loads of other examples where the appropriate common name is a compound word: horseapple / *Maclura pomifera*, buttonwood / *Cephalanthus occidentalis*, barberry / *Berberis thunbergii*, hackberry / *Celtis occidentalis*, walnut / *Juglans nigra*, dogwood / *Cornus florida*, firethorn / *Pyracantha* species, soapberry / *Sapindus drummondii*, and on and on. I suspect that computers and their very limited spell check capabilities are responsible for some of the current 'rash' of taking legitimate compound common names, such as crapemyrtle and incorrectly breaking them into two words. It is up to you to break your computer of such nasty habits.

2. Cultivar Names: One of the problems with cultivar names is that on several occasions, after the plant patent has expired, a new name was applied to an old

plant in order to boost sales. For example, the cultivars, *Juniperus chinensis* 'Mint Julep' and 'Sea Green' are the same plant. Likewise for *J. chinensis* 'Blue Vase' and 'Texas Star'. This same confusing and unethical relabeling has occurred even more often with roses and some herbaceous plants. To the best of my knowledge, the practice of obtaining a trademark for a plant name was first put in place by a large firm specializing in the breeding and marketing of new rose cultivars. Their approach was to a) patent the plant as they had been doing in the past, then b) give the plant a cultivar name that is not attractive or particularly useful, then c) trademark the name of the plant to be used in commerce. The trademark name can then be legally tied to any plants that are asexually produced offspring's from the original parent for as long as someone maintains the trademark, which could go on indefinitely, whereas the plant patent is for 20 years.

True cultivar names should be placed in single quotes such as 'Natchez' crapemyrtle. Cultivar names in single quotes makes it immediately clear to the reader that this is a cultivar of some specific species. On the other hand, placing single quotes around 'Dynamite', which is the registered trademark name of *Lagerstroemia indica*, cultivar 'Whit II', IS INCORRECT. Dynamite®, is a registered trademark, and should ALWAYS be listed with the ® and NEVER in single quotes. The same is true for Raspberry Sundae®, Pink Velour®, Red Rocket® and Tightwad Red®. . Marking a trademark name with ® is an immediate notice to the reader that the plant name has been registered®. The ™ reminds the reader that the plant has a trademark registration on file but has not yet completed registration. The objective is to make it absolutely clear to any reader, anywhere, that the plant is the result of a concerted effort on the part of a plant breeder somewhere and that it is illegal to call this specific selection of this plant by any other name. Likewise, it is illegal to propagate and use the name without paying the owner of the trademark a royalty or at a minimum obtain written permission to use the name, even after the plant patent has expired.