



HOW TO NAME PLANTS ACCURATELY

COMMON NAMES

AND

SCIENTIFIC NAMES

Why are plants' scientific names written in Latin?

Because ever since the early Middle Ages, Latin has been the language of scholars and religious texts in much of Europe.

Every human society has its own words to refer to plants found in its environment. These are the names used locally, called **common names**. This means there are lots of regional names, and the same plant can sometimes have more than 10 different names in the same country.

When European scholars first began to study the living world around them, they needed to have a common vocabulary to identify all known animal and plant species, to make communication easier and avoid misunderstandings.

18th century Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus famously studied, named, and classified around 6,000 plants. He was one of the leading adopters of **binomial nomenclature**: the universal system for naming all living things. This involves a Latin **scientific name** made up of a 'genus name' and a 'species name' given to every living creature, traditionally written in italics. Binomial nomenclature, which is still used to this day, benefits from being universal, so it can be shared by everyone. It means we can all name every species accurately.

EXAMPLE: MAPLES

Maples are grouped together under the **Acer** genus. Together, they make up a group of trees of around 150 related species.

Some common names for the field maple

Field maples can also be called the **common maple** or **hedge maple**, depending on where you are in the world.

Scientific name for the field maple

It is made up of two names: the genus name for maples: **Acer**, and the species name for this particular maple: **campestre**.



Acer saccharum

Sugar maple



Acer monspessulanum

Montpellier maple



Acer campestre

Field maple



Acer platanoides

Norway maple



Acer pseudoplatanus

Sycamore maple

Maples share visible characteristics, such as winged fruits grouped in pairs (known as samaras), and palmate leaves in most species.



Samara

