

Botanical Latin: The Poetry of Herb Names

by Michelle Morgan

The botanical name of a plant consists of Latin words, denoting a generic name (the genus) and the specific epithet (the species, usually two words (Latin binomial), but can be three) eg the botanical name of sage (its vernacular or common name) is *Salvia officinalis*, and for chaste tree is *Vitex agnus-castus*.

Generic name	Specific epithet	Plant species
Salvia	officinalis	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>
Vitex	agnus-castus	<i>Vitex agnus-castus</i>

But how did Latin names come about and what do they mean?

Why Latin?

At the time when the foundations were laid for the present system of naming plants, Latin was the most widely used international language of science and scholarship. This was not classical Latin but an expanded form derived from the Latin used during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. (The Latin used by botanists is very different from that of the Romans because it deals with plants and structures unknown in classical times.)¹ Botanical Latin is mostly Greek in origin, and the work of authors of many nationalities was used in its development.²

Ancient Greek and Latin plant names owe their survival into modern botany through their use primarily by three ancient authors, Theophrastus (c. 370–287 BC), Dioscorides (1st-century Greek physician and herbalist) and Pliny (23–49 AD), whose works were copied by hand through the Middle Ages until the 16th-century invention of printing made them widely available.^{1,2}

Through the Middle Ages (c. 500–1400), the classical Greek medical texts, herbal texts and *receptaria* (recipe books) were mainly preserved in Latin translation by the Benedictine monks. Their monasteries were based around a patient infirmary, a garden containing medicinal plants and a library. Local plants were often substituted for the classical ones.^{3,4,5} As well as being copied, texts were altered over time to reflect the accumulation of experiences and observations of the practicing monks.⁶ The monks also had a working knowledge of herbs: when they had to be picked and how to preserve them. This knowledge was passed down by elderly and more educated monks.⁷

The ancient authors, Theophrastus, Dioscorides and Pliny, did not invent plant names but merely recorded the names of plants in contemporary use (ie the vernacular names). During the Middle Ages other names came into existence to supplement this classical legacy. The first modern maker of Latin-form plant names seems to have been the German physician and herbalist Leonhard Fuchs (1501–1566) who in 1542 coined the name *Digitalis*, among others. The French monk Charles Plumier (1646–1704) revived the procedure of naming plants to commemorate people. He made expeditions to the French islands of the West Indies and distinguished many unknown and unnamed genera and species with the names of botanists and herbalists whose work he was acquainted with such as *Dioscorea*, named in honor of Dioscorides.¹

Only a small number of generic names are genuine Latin names used by the Romans. According to their origin, generic names may be classified:^{1,2}

- Latin plant names used by classical authors, such as Virgil, Columella, Pliny eg *Juniperus*, *Ruscus*.
- Greek names translated into Latin by classical authors eg *Achillea*, *Anemone*, *Bupleurum*. A number of Greek names were derived from Semitic names or from the lost languages of people inhabiting Greece before the coming of the ancestors of the Ancient Greeks, some 4,000 years ago eg *Anemone*, *Hyssopus*.
- Names taken from classical times.

- Names of medieval origin eg *Alchemilla* (of Arabic origin), *Calendula*, *Filipendula*, *Tanacetum*.
- Modern names formed from Latin words eg *Cimicifuga*.
- Modern names formed from Greek words.
- Modern names formed from personal names eg *Albizia*, *Camellia*.
- Modern names formed from vernacular names eg *Datura* (from an Indian vernacular name).
- Modern names formed from geographical names.
- Anagrams made by altering the arrangement of letters in the names of a related genus eg *Milula* from *Allium*, *Lachemilla* from *Alchemilla*.
- Modern names of no evident meaning, their authors having left them unexplained.

Specific epithets display a similar variety, and include:¹

- genuine Latin words eg descriptive (may convey some information about the plant): *multiflorum* (many-flowered), *album* (white); geographical: *graecum* (Greek);
- Greek origin,
- Latin words formed by analogy: *canadensis* (Canadian),
- personal names and other sources.

Why Binomials?

The two-word system of naming (called binomial nomenclature) was first consistently adopted (but not originated) by Swiss scientist Carolus Linnaeus in his work entitled *Species Plantarum* (1753). Linnaeus had begun a system of classification, essentially based on the structure of the flower. For each species Linnaeus wrote a descriptive phrase of twelve words or less (regarded as the formal name), which he abbreviated to two words (as a sort of trivial name). For example, *Tradescantia ephemera phalangoides tripetalum non repnes virginianum gramineum* (which loosely translated means "the annual, upright Tradescantia from Virginia that has a grasslike habit, three petals and stamens with hairs like spider legs"), was given the trivial name *Tradescantia virginiana*. This abbreviated way of naming was favored and continues to be used. The use of binomials allowed a species name to be separate from the species description (and therefore its classification).^{1,2,8,9}

Botanical nomenclature has greatly changed since Linnaeus when "Generic names which have not a root derived from Greek or Latin are to be rejected". However, the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature recommends botanists who are forming names "to use Latin terminations in so far as possible to avoid names not readily adaptable to the Latin tongue; not to make names which are very long or difficult to pronounce in Latin". It is based on the principle that "scientific names of taxonomic groups are treated as Latin regardless of origin".²

A Quick Lesson in Latin Grammar

A quick lesson in Latin grammar helps to explain some of the characteristics of botanical names. The botanical names of plants are treated as Latin regardless of their derivation and the Latin grammatical rules of agreement in gender are used when applicable.¹ The following information is referenced from *Stearn's Botanical Latin* and *Stearn's Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners*.^{1,2}

The genus is either a noun (a naming word) or a word treated as a noun, and so has masculine, feminine or neuter gender. There are no completely reliable rules for ascertaining the gender of generic names but the following notes apply:

- Generic names ending in *-us* are mostly masculine eg *Humulus* – unless they are the names of trees eg *Prunus* in which case they are feminine.
- Most generic names ending in *-a* are feminine eg *Rosa* – unless they are derived from neuter Greek words ending in *-ma* eg *Ganoderma* (in which case they are neuter).
- Generic names ending in *-ago*, *-ix*, *-odes*, *-oides*, *-opsis* are feminine eg *Solidago*, *Salix*, *Codonopsis*.
- Most generic names ending in *-is* or *-es* are feminine eg *Vitis*, *Menyanthes*.
- Generic names ending in *-dendron* and *-um* are neuter eg *Allium*.

Specific epithets may be either adjectives (and participles – parts of verbs that function as adjectives) or nouns. Adjectives are words added to nouns in order to express something related to the noun which could not be expressed without the help of the adjectives. Verbs are doing words, they express action or occurrence. Although a noun normally has only one gender, adjectives exist in masculine, feminine and neuter states.

Specific epithets as adjectives and participles form three main groups:

masculine, feminine and neuter forms that have a different ending
-us (masculine), -a (feminine), -um (neuter) Example: <i>longus</i> (masculine), <i>longa</i> (feminine), <i>longum</i> (neuter)
masculine, feminine forms that have the same ending; neuter has a different one
-is (masculine), -is (feminine), -e (neuter) Example: <i>officinalis</i> (masculine), <i>officinalis</i> (feminine), <i>officinale</i> (neuter)
masculine, feminine and neuter forms that have the same ending
Example: <i>repens</i> (masculine), <i>repens</i> (feminine), <i>repens</i> (neuter)

Other examples of species epithets for medicinal herbs with these endings: *sativa/sativum*, *virginica/virginicus*, *racemosa/racemosus*, *indica/indicus*, *alba/album*, *purpurea/purpureum*, *annua/annuum*, *lutea/luteum*, *purshiana/purshianus*, *vulgaris/vulgare*.

Species epithets as adjectives usually must agree in gender with the generic names they qualify, for example:

- *Humulus lupulus*: *Humulus* (masculine), *lupulus* (masculine)
- *Salix alba*: *Salix* (feminine), *alba* (feminine)
- *Viscum album*: *Viscum* (neuter), *album* (neuter)
- *Rosmarinus officinalis*: *Rosmarinus* (masculine), *officinalis* (masculine)
- *Calendula officinalis*: *Calendula* (feminine), *officinalis* (feminine)
- *Taraxacum officinale*: *Taraxacum* (neuter), *officinale* (neuter)

Exceptions occur and may be the result of recent sloppiness such as the botanical name of fringe tree is *Chionanthus virginicus* but *Chionanthus virginica* is sometimes also used. (*Chionanthus* is masculine.) *Rhamnus purshiana* is the current botanical name for cascara, but *Rhamnus purshianus* is also noted as a botanical synonym. *Rhamnus* is now regarded as masculine but has historically been considered both as feminine and as masculine, thus giving rise to the alternative species epithets *purshiana* and *purshianus* found in the literature. (The names of trees ending in *-os* were feminine in Greek, and when Latinized (eg *rhamnus*, which later became the genus) they usually kept the original gender (ie feminine). Early botanists used *Rhamnus* as if it were masculine, and since then the practice has varied.¹⁰)

Nouns used as specific epithets may not be affected by the gender of the generic name – they merely follow the generic name and are not linked to it grammatically eg *Sedum rosea*: *Sedum* (neuter), *rosea* (feminine). (In this case *rosea* is the feminine noun (rose), in contrast to *rosea* the adjective (rose-colored) eg *Rhodiola rosea*: *Rhodiola* (feminine), *rosea* (feminine), where the gender of genus and species epithet agree.)

In addition, nouns used as specific epithets may be:

- vernacular names eg *Codonopsis tangshen* (tangshen is the vernacular name from traditional Chinese medicine – the plant is now known as *Codonopsis pilulosa*),
- used in the singular or genitive plural (and include personal names).

The derived meaning (or etymology) of botanical names is quite a field of study. The meaning of the botanical names of selected herbs where the information was readily available is listed below in Table 1. (Some species epithets were not found.)

The vernacular or common names of plants also have a history of meaning, but that is another story!

A Special Word: officinalis

The definition of *officinalis* is "used in medicine". Yet this species epithet more often refers to the past rather than the present (it has a history of use – see below). It is derived from *opificina*, shortened to *officina*, originally meaning a workshop or shop, later a monastic storeroom, then a herb store, pharmacy or drug shop.²

And moving away from botanical Latin for a moment into pharmacy ... the word 'officinal' was also derived from the Latin *officina*. In original usage, officinal substances were those considered essential and therefore expected to be kept on hand in all apothecaries' shops. Thus, a pharmacopoeia of officinal substances was designed not only to establish and maintain acceptable standards of product strength and purity but also to standardize the pharmacists' product stocks as well (it was regarded as the fundamental standard). The term 'officinal' was dropped from the seventh edition of the *United States*

Pharmacopoeia (1890) in favor of 'official'. This signaled that the pharmacopoeial substances contained therein had acquired legal as well as professional standing. ('Official' suggested a professional expectation of availability and usage, 'official' was indicative of its rising status in statutory law.)¹¹ The indigenous peoples of North and South America used well over 200 medicinal plants which were official in *The Pharmacopoeia of the United States of America* for varying periods since the first edition appeared in 1820, or in the *National Formulary* since it began in 1888.¹²

The Meaning of the Botanical Names: Selected Herbs

Common Name	Botanical Names	Meaning of Botanical Names
Agrimony	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	<i>Agrimonia</i> : A misrendering of <i>argemōnia</i> from the Greek name Argemone. <i>eupatoria</i> : See Boneset.
Albizia	<i>Albizia lebbek</i>	<i>Albizia</i> : In honor of F. del Albizzi, a Florentine nobleman who in 1749 introduced <i>A. julibrissin</i> into cultivation. <i>lebbek</i> : Vernacular (Indian?) name.
Alfalfa	<i>Medicago sativa</i>	<i>Medicago</i> : The classical name for a crop plant, from Geek <i>mēdike</i> , medick; introduced from Media. <i>sativa</i> : Cultivated.
Aloe Vera	<i>Aloe barbadensis</i>	<i>Aloe</i> : From the Arabic name of these perennial succulents. <i>barbadensis</i> : of Barbados, West Indies.
Andrographis	<i>Andrographis paniculata</i>	<i>Andrographis</i> : From <i>aner</i> , a man; <i>grapho</i> , to write. <i>paniculata</i> : With flowers arranged in panicles.
Angelica Root	Angelica archangelica	<i>Angelica</i> : So named on account of its medicinal properties reputedly revealed by an angel. <i>archangelica</i> : * Referring to the Archangel Raphael, who according to medieval legend, revealed its virtues. (From <i>arche</i> , chief; angelica.)
Arnica	<i>Arnica montana</i>	<i>Arnica</i> : The classical name for this plant. Derivation obscure. Another reference suggests it is derived from <i>arnakis</i> , a lamb's skin – because of the likeness of the leaves. <i>montana</i> : Pertaining to the mountains.
Ashwaganda, Withania	<i>Withania somnifera</i>	<i>Withania</i> : According to many authors the genus was named possibly (with misspelling included) after the English paleobotanist Henry Thomas Maire Witham, 1779–1844. <i>somnifera</i> : Sleep-producing.
Astragalus	<i>Astragalus membranaceus</i>	<i>Astragalus</i> : Greek word for some leguminous plants but applicable to this genus. Also: from <i>astragalos</i> , vertebra, or talus – the seeds being squeezed into a squarish form in some species <i>membranaceus</i> : Skinlike, membranous.
Bacopa	<i>Bacopa monniera</i> , <i>Bacopa monnieri</i>	<i>Bacopa</i> : From a South-American Indian name. <i>monniera</i> : * In honor of William le Monnier, once professor of botany in the Jardin du Roi, at Paris.
Baptisia	<i>Baptisia tinctoria</i>	<i>Baptisia</i> : From Greek <i>bapto</i> , to dye. <i>tinctoria</i> : Used in dyeing.
Barberry	<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>	<i>Berberis</i> : Refer to Oregon Grape. <i>vulgaris</i> : Common.
Bayberry	<i>Myrica cerifera</i>	<i>Myrica</i> : Derived from the Greek name <i>myrikē</i> for tamarisk. The greasy covering of the fruit of these shrubs provides the aromatic tallow from which bayberry candles are made. <i>cerifera</i> : Wax-bearing.
Beth Root	<i>Trillium erectum</i>	<i>Trillium</i> : From Latin from <i>trilix</i> or <i>tri</i> , three, triple. Leaves and other parts are in threes. <i>erectum</i> : Erect or upright.
Bilberry	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	<i>Vaccinium</i> : Refer to Cranberry. <i>myrtillus</i> : Small myrtle.
Black Cohosh	<i>Cimicifuga racemosa</i>	<i>Cimicifuga</i> : From Latin <i>cimex</i> , a bug; <i>fugo</i> , to drive away; from the use of <i>C. foetida</i> as an insect repellent. <i>racemosa</i> : With flowers in racemes.
Black Haw	<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>	<i>Viburnum</i> : Refer to Cramp Bark. <i>prunifolium</i> : With leaves like plum.

Black Walnut	<i>Juglans nigra</i>	<i>Juglans</i> : Refer to Butternut. <i>nigra</i> : Black. Often applied to roots as well as flowers.
Bladderwrack	<i>Fucus vesiculosus</i>	<i>Fucus</i> : Derived from <i>phukus</i> , a Greek name for seaweed. <i>vesiculosus</i> : Furnished with small bladders or vesicles.
Blue Cohosh	<i>Caulophyllum thalictroides</i>	<i>Caulophyllum</i> : From Greek <i>kaulos</i> , a stem; <i>phyllon</i> , a leaf. The stem of this perennial seems to form a stalk for a single large leaf. <i>thalictroides</i> : A compound word - <i>oides</i> , like or resembling, having the form of; <i>Thalictrum</i> from <i>thallo</i> , to grow green – in allusion to the bright color of the young shoots.
Blue Flag	<i>Iris versicolor</i>	<i>Iris</i> : Named for the Greek goddess of the rainbow. <i>versicolor</i> : Various colored.
Boneset	<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>	<i>Eupatorium</i> : The Greek name for these plants, commemorating Mithridates VI Eupator (132–63 BC), King of Pontus, enemy of Rome in Asia Minor. <i>perfoliatum</i> : With the leaf surrounding or embracing the stem; perfoliate.
Boswellia	<i>Boswellia serrata</i>	<i>Boswellia</i> : Named in honor of James Boswell (1740-1795), friend and biographer of Dr Samuel Johnson. <i>serrata</i> : Saw-toothed.
Buchu	<i>Barosma betulina</i> (<i>Agathosma betulina</i>)	<i>Barosma</i> : Greek <i>barys</i> , heavy; <i>ōsmē</i> , fragrance – as some species are aromatic. <i>Agathosma</i> : From Greek <i>agathos</i> , good; <i>ōsmē</i> , fragrance. <i>betulina</i> : Pertaining to birch.
Bugleweed	<i>Lycopus virginicus</i>	<i>Lycopus</i> : Greek <i>lykōs</i> , wolf; <i>pōus</i> , a foot – from some fancied resemblance to a wolf's foot. <i>virginicus</i> : Of Virginia, USA, named for Queen Elizabeth I, England's 'Virgin Queen'.
Bupleurum	<i>Bupleurum falcatum</i>	<i>Bupleurum</i> : From Greek <i>boupleuros</i> , meaning ox-rib – a name for another plant. <i>falcatum</i> : Sickle-shaped.
Burdock	<i>Arctium lappa</i>	<i>Arctium</i> : Greek <i>arction</i> , name of a plant – perhaps a mullein. <i>lappa</i> : Latin name for a bur.
Butcher's Broom	<i>Ruscus aculeatus</i>	<i>Ruscus</i> : Formerly Bruscus. From <i>beus</i> , box, and <i>kelen</i> , holly – the Celtic for box-holly. <i>aculeatus</i> : Prickly.
Butternut	<i>Juglans cinerea</i>	<i>Juglans</i> : Latin from <i>jovis</i> , of Jupiter; <i>glans</i> , an acorn. <i>cinerea</i> : Ash-colored.
Calendula	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>	<i>Calendula</i> : Latin <i>calendae</i> , the first day of the month and also the day on which interest must be paid. The allusion is to the long flowering of some of the species. <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Californian Poppy	<i>Eschscholtzia californica</i> (<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>)	<i>Eschscholtzia</i> : Named in honor of Johann Friedrich Eschscholtz (1793–1831) of Tartu Estonia, who accompanied Otto von Kotzebue on his first expedition around the world (1815–1818). <i>californica</i> : Of California.
Cascara	<i>Rhamnus purshiana</i> , <i>Rhamnus purshianus</i>	<i>Rhamnus</i> : The Greek name of various spiny shrubs. <i>purshiana</i> , <i>purshianus</i> : ? Entry for Purshia: Named for Frederick Traugott Pursh (1774–1820), German explorer, collector, horticulturist, author who lived in the US from 1799 to 1811 and wrote <i>Flora Americae Septentrionalis</i> .
Cat's Claw	<i>Uncaria tomentosa</i>	<i>Uncaria</i> : From the Latin <i>uncus</i> , hook. The plant has hook-like thorns on its petioles. <i>tomentosa</i> : Densely woolly; with matted hairs.
Cayenne	<i>Capsicum</i> spp., <i>Capsicum annuum</i>	<i>Capsicum</i> : From Greek <i>kapto</i> , to bite – on account of the hot, pungent quality of the pericarp. Another suggestion: from the Latin <i>capsa</i> , box. The fruit resembles a box. <i>annuum</i> : Annual.
Celery Seed	<i>Apium graveolens</i>	<i>Apium</i> : The classical Latin name for parsley and celery. <i>graveolens</i> : Heavily scented.
Chamomile	<i>Matricaria recutita</i>	<i>Matricaria</i> : Medieval name possibly from the Latin <i>matrix</i> , womb, because of its medieval use in uterine disorders. <i>recutita</i> : Circumcized.
Chaparral	<i>Larrea tridentata</i>	<i>Larrea</i> : Named for Juan Antonio de Larrea, Spanish patron of science, around 1810. <i>tridentata</i> : Three-toothed.

Chaste Tree	<i>Vitex agnus-castus</i>	<i>Vitex</i> : From <i>vieo</i> , to bind – in allusion to the flexible branches. <i>agnus</i> : Latin referring to 'lamb' (a symbol of purity?) or may have been a mistaken derivation of the Greek <i>agnos</i> , god-pleasing. Dioscorides used the term <i>agonos</i> to mean 'infertile'. <i>castus</i> : Spotless; chaste.
Chinese Skullcap, Baical Skullcap	<i>Scutellaria baicalensis</i>	<i>Scutellaria</i> : Latin <i>scutella</i> , a small dish or saucer – from the pouch on the fruiting calyx. <i>baicalensis</i> : From Lake Baikal in eastern Siberia.
Cinnamon Quills	<i>Cinnamomum zeylanicum</i>	<i>Cinnamomum</i> : From the classical Greek name for cinnamon. Derived from the Arabic <i>kinamon</i> , cinnamon. <i>zeylanicum</i> : Of Ceylon (Sri Lanka).
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>	<i>Galium</i> : From Greek <i>gala</i> , milk. Yellow bedstraw (<i>G. verum</i>) can be used in cheese-making to curdle the milk. <i>aparine</i> : * Latin and Greek <i>aparine</i> for cleavers.
Clove	<i>Syzygium aromaticum</i> (<i>Eugenia caryophyllus</i>)	<i>Syzygium</i> : From Greek <i>syzygos</i> , joined; with reference to the paired leaves and branchlets of a Jamaican species for which the name was used originally. <i>Eugenia</i> : Named in honor of Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663-1736). Born in Paris but spurned by the French court, he became a very successful Austrian general, defeating first the Turks, then the French, pursuing war with rare energy, imagination and resolution. <i>aromaticum</i> : Aromatic, fragrant. <i>caryophyllus</i> : From Greek <i>carya</i> , walnut; <i>phyllōn</i> , a leaf – referring to the aromatic smell of walnut leaves, which lead to the use of the name for the clove (and other plants).
Codonopsis	<i>Codonopsis pilosula</i>	<i>Codonopsis</i> : From Greek <i>kōdōn</i> , a bell; <i>ōpsis</i> , resembling – from the shape of the corolla of these herbs.
Coleus	<i>Coleus forskohlii</i> (<i>Plectranthus forskohlii</i>)	<i>Coleus</i> : From Greek <i>kōlēōs</i> , a sheath – an allusion to the manner in which the stamens are enclosed. <i>Plectranthus</i> : From Greek <i>plēctrōn</i> , spur; <i>anthos</i> , flower. <i>forskohlii</i> – Entry for <i>forskohlei</i> (which it is sometimes spelt): In honor of Pehr Forsskål (1732–1763), Swedish botanist and traveler who collected specimens in Egypt and Arabia on a Danish expedition on which he died.
Comfrey	<i>Symphytum officinale</i>	<i>Symphytum</i> : Greek name of herbs which were reputed to heal wounds, from <i>symphyo</i> , make to grow together; <i>phyton</i> , plant. <i>officinale</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Corn Silk	<i>Zea mays</i>	<i>Zea</i> : From the Greek name for another cereal. <i>mays</i> : From Mexican vernacular name for maize (Indian corn).
Corydalis	<i>Corydalis ambigua</i>	<i>Corydalis</i> : Greek word <i>korydalos</i> , meaning a lark. The flowers have spurs like those of larks. <i>ambigua</i> : Uncertain; doubtful.
Couch Grass	<i>Agropyron repens</i>	<i>Agropyron</i> : Derived from <i>agros</i> , a field; <i>pyros</i> , wheat. <i>repens</i> : Creeping.
Cramp Bark	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	<i>Viburnum</i> : Said to be from <i>vieo</i> , to tie – because of the pliability of some of the branches. <i>opulus</i> : <i>ōpūlus</i> was a kind of maple.
Cranberry	<i>Vaccinium macrocarpon</i>	<i>Vaccinium</i> : A Latin name apparently derived from the same prehistoric Mediterranean language as the Greek <i>hyakinthos</i> and transferred to these berry-bearing scrubs. <i>macrocarpon</i> : Large-fruited.
Cranesbill	<i>Geranium maculatum</i>	<i>Geranium</i> : <i>Gēranion</i> is the classical Greek name, from <i>gēranos</i> , a crane – in allusion to the long beak of the carpels. <i>maculatum</i> : Spotted.
Crataeva	<i>Crataeva nurvala</i> , <i>Crataeva nurvala</i>	<i>Crataeva</i> : After Crataevus, a Greek botanist who lived in the time of Hippocrates.
Damiana	<i>Turnera diffusa</i>	<i>Turnera</i> : In honor of William Turner (c. 1508–1568), the 'Father of English Botany', clergyman, physician and herbalist, who spent several years in exile on account of his ardent Protestant views and published the first botanical works in English with any claim to originality. <i>diffusa</i> : Spreading, diffuse.
Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	<i>Taraxacum</i> : Medieval name traceable through Arabic to Persian <i>talkh chakok</i> , meaning bitter herb. <i>officinale</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.

Devil's Claw	<i>Harpagophytum procumbens</i>	<i>Harpagophytum</i> : Greek <i>harpagos</i> , a hook, a rake; or <i>harpazo</i> , to rob, ravish and <i>phyton</i> , a plant. Latin <i>harpago onis</i> , hook, a grappling hook, drag or <i>harpago avi atum are</i> , to rob. An allusion to the armed capsules. <i>procumbens</i> : Prostrate.
Dill Seed	<i>Anethum graveolens</i>	<i>Anethum</i> : Greek name for dill. <i>graveolens</i> : Heavily scented.
Dong Quai	<i>Angelica sinensis</i> , <i>Angelica polymorpha</i>	<i>Angelica</i> : Refer to Angelica Root. <i>sinensis</i> : Chinese. <i>polymorpha</i> : Compound word of Greek <i>poly</i> , many; <i>morpha</i> , shaped.
Echinacea	<i>Echinacea angustifolia</i> , <i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	<i>Echinacea</i> : From Greek <i>ēchinos</i> , a hedgehog – in allusion to the prickly scales of the receptacle. <i>angustifolia</i> : Having narrow leaves. <i>purpurea</i> : Purple. (Actually 'dull red with a dash of blue'. From <i>purpura</i> (Greek) the name for the shellfish of the eastern Mediterranean Sea yielding to the Phoenicians, particularly the Tyrians, a liquid for the manufacture of the celebrated purple dye of classical antiquity, later the name of the dye itself. This varies according to the shellfish used and the processing applied, and the epithet <i>purpureus</i> came to cover various red colors; more recently (~1940) it embraces colors between red and violet.)
Elder Flower	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	<i>Sambucus</i> : Latin, perhaps connected with <i>sambuca</i> , a kind of harp (which is supposed to have been made of elder wood). <i>nigra</i> : Black. Often applied to roots as well as flowers.
Elecampane	<i>Inula helenium</i>	<i>Inula</i> : A corruption of <i>Helenium</i> . <i>helenium</i> : From the Greek name <i>hēlēniōn</i> , named for Helen of Troy.
Eleuthero	<i>Eleutherococcus senticosus</i> (previously <i>Acanthopanax senticosus</i>)	<i>Eleutherococcus</i> : From the Greek <i>eleutheros</i> , free; <i>kokkos</i> a berry. <i>Acanthopanax</i> : Greek <i>akantha</i> , a thorn; <i>panax</i> , ginseng – which this genus of spiny trees and shrubs resembles. <i>senticosus</i> : Thorny, full of thorns.
Euphorbia	<i>Euphorbia hirta</i>	<i>Euphorbia</i> : Classically supposed to have been named for Euphorbus, physician to the King of Mauretania. <i>hirta</i> : Hairy.
Evening Primrose	<i>Oenothera biennis</i>	<i>Oenothera</i> : The Greek name <i>ōinōthēras</i> , which is sometimes supposed to derive from <i>oinos</i> , wine; <i>thera</i> , booty, is more likely a corruption of <i>ōnōthēras</i> , from <i>ōnōs</i> , ass; <i>thēra</i> , hunting, chase, pursuit, or <i>thēr</i> , wild beast, comparable to the alternative name <i>ōnagra</i> . Originally, of course, it has nothing to do with the yellow-flowered American plants to which it has been transferred. <i>biennis</i> : Biennial.
Eyebright	<i>Euphrasia officinalis</i>	<i>Euphrasia</i> : Greek <i>euphrasia</i> , delight, mirth. <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
False Unicorn	<i>Chamaelirium luteum</i>	<i>Chamaelirium</i> : From Greek <i>chamai</i> , dwarf; <i>lirion</i> , a lily. <i>luteum</i> : Yellow from <i>lutum</i> , dyer's greenweed – the source of yellow dye.
Fennel	<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	<i>Foeniculum</i> : Latin for fennel, which in Italian, is <i>finocchio</i> . <i>vulgare</i> : Common.
Fenugreek	<i>Trigonella foenum-graecum</i>	<i>Trigonella</i> : Diminutive of Latin <i>trigonus</i> , three-cornered, triangular, from Greek <i>tri</i> , three; <i>gonus</i> , angle. The flowers appear triangular. <i>foenum</i> : ? Latin for hay. <i>graecum</i> : Greek, Grecian.
Feverfew	<i>Tanacetum parthenium</i> (previously <i>Chrysanthemum parthenium</i>)	<i>Tanacetum</i> : From the medieval Latin name <i>tanazita</i> , still used in some European places, ultimately derived from Greek <i>athanasia</i> , immortality. Once regarded as a specific for intestinal worms (tansy, <i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>), it was formerly used in Europe as well as in some rural areas of New England in funeral winding sheets, to discourage worms. <i>Chrysanthemum</i> : Greek <i>chrysos</i> , gold; <i>anthēmōn</i> , flower. <i>parthenium</i> : * From <i>parthenos</i> , a virgin; referring to the white rays or to the shape of the ovary or in allusion to medicinal qualities.
Fringe Tree	<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i> , <i>Chionanthus virginica</i>	<i>Chionanthus</i> : Greek <i>chōn</i> , snow; <i>anthos</i> , a flower. <i>Chionanthus virginicus</i> has snowy white flowers. <i>virginicus</i> , <i>virginica</i> : Of Virginia, USA, named for Queen Elizabeth I, England's 'Virgin Queen'.
Garlic	<i>Allium sativum</i>	<i>Allium</i> : From the classical Latin <i>anem</i> for garlic. <i>sativum</i> : Cultivated.

Gentian	<i>Gentiana lutea</i>	<i>Gentiana</i> : Named for King Gentius of Illyria (around 500 BC) who was reputed to have discovered the medicinal virtues of the root of <i>G. lutea</i> . <i>lutea</i> : Yellow from <i>luteum</i> , dyer's greenweed – the source of a yellow dye.
Ginger	<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	<i>Zingiber</i> : From the Greek name which, in turn, is said to derive from an East Indian word <i>singivera</i> . <i>officinale</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Ginkgo	<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>	<i>Ginkgo</i> : The puzzling name Ginkgo is a misrendering of the Japanese name <i>gin</i> (silver), <i>kyō</i> (apricot), used in the 17th century in Japan but now obsolete. This genus, of which many fossil forms exist to indicate a former wide distribution, now consists of one species, only wild in a small area of central China, but extensively cultivated over much of China and Japan, whence introduced into Europe in the 18th century. <i>biloba</i> : Two-lobed.
Globe Artichoke	<i>Cynara scolymus</i>	<i>Cynara</i> : Latin from <i>kuon</i> , a dog – in reference to the spines of the involucre. <i>scolymus</i> : * Latin name for Spanish oyster-plant. The biennial has edible roots.
Goat's Rue	<i>Galega officinalis</i>	<i>Galega</i> : From Greek <i>gala</i> , milk – relating to its galactagogue effect. <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Golden Rod	<i>Solidago virgaurea</i>	<i>Solidago</i> : From <i>solido</i> , to make whole – in allusion to the healing properties of these perennial herbs.
Golden Seal	<i>Hydrastis canadensis</i>	<i>Hydrastis</i> : Greek <i>hydōr</i> , water. Name suggested by the leaf of <i>Hydrophyllum canadense</i> , water-leaf, with which <i>Hydrastis</i> was confused. <i>canadensis</i> : Canadian, but used by early writers also to cover the north-eastern United States.
Gotu Kola	<i>Centella asiatica</i> (previously <i>Hydrocotyle asiatica</i>)	<i>Centella</i> : Possibly from the Latin <i>cento onis</i> , patch work or <i>centum</i> , a hundred or <i>centrum</i> the centre. Or from the Greek <i>kentron</i> patch work, a prickle or Greek <i>kenteo</i> to prick, sting, pierce. <i>Hydrocotyle</i> : Greek <i>hydōr</i> , water; <i>kōtylē</i> a small cup – from the form of the leaves of <i>H. vulgaris</i> . <i>asiatica</i> : Asian.
Grape	<i>Vitis vinifera</i>	<i>Vitis</i> : Latin name for grapevine. <i>vinifera</i> : Wine-bearing.
Gravel Root	<i>Eupatorium purpureum</i>	<i>Eupatorium</i> : Refer to Boneset. <i>purpureum</i> : Purple. (See also <i>Echinacea purpurea</i> .)
Greater Celandine	<i>Chelidonium majus</i>	<i>Chelidonium</i> : From Greek <i>chēlidōn</i> , a swallow. Supposedly because it's first flowering and the arrival of swallows sometimes coincide. <i>majus</i> : Bigger, larger.
Green Tea	<i>Camellia sinensis</i> (previously <i>Thea sinensis</i>)	<i>Camellia</i> : Named for Georg Josef Kamel (1661-1706), Jesuit pharmacist, born at Brno, Moravia; he botanized from 1688 onwards in Luzon (in the Philippines) and wrote an account of the plants there which was published in 1704 by his English correspondent John Ray under his Latinized name, Camēllus. <i>Thea</i> : From the Dutch rendering <i>thee</i> of the Chinese (Amoy) word for tea, <i>t'e</i> , which in Mandarin is <i>ch'a</i> . The cultivation of tea was virtually a Chinese monopoly until in the 1840s Robert Fortune exported both tea plants and skilled labor to India to establish the industry there. <i>sinensis</i> : Chinese.
Grindelia	<i>Grindelia camporum</i>	<i>Grindelia</i> : Named for David Hieronymus Grindel (1766–1836), German professor of botany at Riga. <i>camporum</i> : From Greek <i>campus</i> , field; <i>eschara</i> , rough.
Ground Ivy	<i>Glechoma hederacea</i> , <i>Nepeta hederacea</i>	<i>Glechoma</i> : From Greek <i>glēchōn</i> , a kind of mint. <i>Nepeta</i> : Latin name for an aromatic plant. (Another reference suggests it derives from <i>Nepet</i> , the name of a town in Tuscany, where the plants were first found.) <i>hederacea</i> : Resembling ivy.
Gymnema	<i>Gymnema sylvestre</i>	<i>Gymnema</i> : From <i>gymnos</i> , naked; <i>nema</i> , a thread – in reference to the stamens. <i>sylvestre</i> : Growing in woods, forest-loving, wild.
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>	<i>Crataegus</i> : The Greek name for the tree. From <i>kratos</i> , strength – an allusion to the strength and hardness of the wood. <i>monogyna</i> : With one pistil.
Hemidesmus	<i>Hemidesmus indicus</i>	<i>Hemidesmus</i> : From <i>hemisus</i> , half, and <i>desmos</i> , tie; alluding to the filaments.

		<i>indicus</i> : Literally of India but also applied to plants originating throughout the East Indies and from as far away as China. It seems as if any plant that came home in an Indiaman (ship engaged in trade with India or the East Indies) might be given this specific epithet without further ado.
Holy Basil	<i>Ocimum tenuiflorum</i>	<i>Ocimum</i> : From the Greek name <i>ōkimōn</i> for an aromatic herb. <i>tenuiflorum</i> : With slender flowers.
Hops	<i>Humulus lupulus</i>	<i>Humulus</i> : Medieval name apparently Latinized from a Low German or Slav name for the hop. <i>lupulus</i> : Meaning a small wolf, an allusion to the plant's habit of smothering the trees over which it grows.
Horsechestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	<i>Aesculus</i> : The Latin name for a kind of oak bearing edible acorns but applied by Linnaeus to this genus (although it contains neither oaks nor trees producing edible nuts). <i>hippocastanum</i> : Latin name for the horsechestnut. The Turks used the chestnut-like seeds (of <i>Aesculus</i>) as a medicine for horses.
Horseradish	<i>Armoracia rusticana</i>	<i>Armoracia</i> : The classical Latin name of a related plant. <i>rusticana</i> : Pertaining to the country.
Horsetail	<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	<i>Equisetum</i> : Latin <i>equus</i> , a horse; <i>seta</i> , a bristle. In the Carboniferous period, the earth was covered with immense forests of gigantic woody <i>Equisetum</i> -like plants, the fossilized remains of which comprise most of our coal measures. It was called scouring rush in the 17th century because the presence of silica gave a fine finish in scouring pewter. <i>arvense</i> : Growing in or pertaining to cultivated fields.
Hydrangea	<i>Hydrangea arborescens</i>	<i>Hydrangea</i> : Greek <i>hydōr</i> , water; <i>angos</i> , a jar. The fruit of these scrubs is cup-shaped. <i>arborescens</i> : Tending to be woody; growing in treelike form.
Hyssop	<i>Hyssopus officinalis</i>	<i>Hyssopus</i> : The classical name for this sweet herb adapted from a Semitic plant name <i>ēzōb</i> . The plant to which it is now applied is almost certainly not the hyssop of the Bible, for <i>Hyssopus</i> is not indigenous in Palestine. (The biblical hyssop is thought to be <i>Origanum maru</i> .) <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Indian Barberry	<i>Berberis aristata</i>	<i>Berberis</i> : Refer to Oregon Grape. <i>aristata</i> : Bearded; furnished with an awn.
Jamaica Dogwood	<i>Piscidia erythrina</i>	<i>Piscidia</i> : From the Latin <i>piscis</i> , fish; <i>caedo</i> , cut down, slaughter, kill – in allusion to use as a fish poison; formed by analogy with <i>hōmicīda</i> , man-killer, murderer. <i>erythrina</i> : * From Greek <i>ērythrōs</i> , red; an allusion to the color of the flower.
Juniper	<i>Juniperus communis</i>	<i>Juniperus</i> : Latin name for juniper. <i>communis</i> : Common; general; growing in company.
Kava	<i>Piper methysticum</i>	<i>Piper</i> : The Latin name from Greek <i>pēpēri</i> , itself derived from an Indian name. <i>methysticum</i> : From the Greek <i>methustikos</i> derived from <i>methu</i> , intoxicating drink.
Kola Nut	<i>Cola vera</i>	<i>Cola</i> : From the African vernacular name. <i>vera</i> : True.
Korean Ginseng	<i>Panax ginseng</i>	<i>Panax</i> : From Greek <i>panakēs</i> , all-healing, a panacea – in allusion to the high value placed on it by the Chinese for its medicinal purposes. <i>ginseng</i> : ? May be a vernacular name.
Ladies Mantle	<i>Alchemilla vulgaris</i>	<i>Alchemilla</i> : Origin uncertain, perhaps the Latinized version of an Arabic name. <i>vulgaris</i> : Common.
Lavender	<i>Lavandula officinalis</i>	<i>Lavandula</i> : From Latin <i>lavo</i> , to wash; from its use in soaps and toiletries. <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Lemon Balm	<i>Melissa officinalis</i>	<i>Melissa</i> : From Greek <i>mēlissa</i> , a honeybee – also the name of a Cretan princess who first discovered how to get honey. According to Gerard (herbalist in the 17th century), bees "are delighted with this herbe above all others". <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Lesser Periwinkle	<i>Vinca minor</i>	<i>Vinca</i> : Contracted from the Latin name <i>vinca pervinca</i> or <i>vincapervinca</i> , apparently from <i>vincio</i> , blind, wind around – in allusion to the use of the long flexible shoots in making wreaths. <i>minor</i> : Smaller.
Licorice	<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>	<i>Glycyrrhiza</i> : From Greek <i>glykys</i> , sweet; <i>rhiza</i> , a root. <i>glabra</i> : Without hairs; glabrous.

Lime Flowers	<i>Tilia cordata</i>	<i>Tilia</i> : The Latin name for the linden or lime tree, known in southern Sweden (Småland) as linn and the origin of the name Linnaeus. <i>cordata</i> : Heart-shaped.
Lomatium	<i>Lomatium dissectum</i>	<i>Lomatium</i> : May be derived from <i>loma</i> , a border. <i>dissectum</i> : Deeply cut; divided into deep lobes or segments.
Malabar Nut Tree, Adhatoda	<i>Adhatoda vasica</i> (<i>Justicia vasica</i>)	<i>Adhatoda</i> : Latinized from the native Tamil and Sinhalese name: <i>ada</i> , goat; <i>thodai</i> , not touch – with reference to the bitter leaves. <i>Justicia</i> : Named for James Justice (1730–1763), celebrated 18th-century Scottish horticulturalist.
Marshmallow Root	<i>Althaea officinalis</i>	<i>Althaea</i> : Greek <i>althaia</i> , a cure, something that heals. <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Meadowsweet	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> (<i>Spiraea ulmaria</i>)	<i>Filipendula</i> : Latin <i>filum</i> , a thread; <i>pendulus</i> , hanging. The root tubers in <i>F. vulgaris</i> hang together with threads. <i>Spiraea</i> : Greek <i>speiraira</i> , a plant used for garlands, from <i>speira</i> , spiral, anything twisted. <i>ulmaria</i> : From Latin <i>ulmus</i> , elm – referring to the leaflets of meadowsweet (<i>F. ulmaria</i>).
Mexican Valerian	<i>Valeriana edulis</i>	<i>Valeriana</i> : The medieval Latin name, possibly derived from Latin <i>valere</i> , to be healthy – in allusion to the plant's medicinal uses in nervousness. <i>edulis</i> : Edible.
Milk Thistle	<i>Silybum marianum</i> (<i>Carduus marianum</i>)	<i>Silybum</i> : The Greek name, <i>silybōn</i> , for some thistlelike plant. The English names (milk thistle, Lady's thistle, blessed thistle) apply to <i>S. marianum</i> , also called Our Lady's thistle from the white spots on the leaves supposed to have been the results of milk dropped on them by the Virgin Mary. <i>Carduus</i> : The classical Latin name for thistle. From <i>ard</i> , in Celtic, meaning a point – the plants being mostly spiny. <i>marianum</i> : Specific epithet of various plants with mottled leaves, notably <i>Silybum marianum</i> .
Mistletoe	<i>Viscum album</i>	<i>Viscum</i> : From <i>viscus</i> , bird-lime – on account of the sticky nature of the berries. <i>album</i> : White, particularly a dull rather than a glossy white.
Motherwort	<i>Leonurus cardiaca</i>	<i>Leonurus</i> : From Greek <i>lēōn</i> , a lion; <i>oura</i> , a tail; with reference to the inflorescence. <i>cardiaca</i> : ? Greek <i>kardia</i> , heart.
Mugwort	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	<i>Artemisia</i> : Refer to Wormwood. <i>vulgaris</i> : Common.
Mullein	<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	<i>Verbascum</i> : Said to be from <i>barbascum</i> , bearded – in allusion to the bearded filaments. <i>thapsus</i> : ? The genus <i>Thapsia</i> is derived from the Greek <i>thapsos</i> , a plant or wood used for dying yellow; Latin <i>thapsia</i> , a poisonous shrub.
Myrrh	<i>Commiphora molmol</i>	<i>Commiphora</i> : From the Greek meaning 'gum' and 'bear'. The tree bears a gum-like rubber.
Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>	<i>Urtica</i> : Latin from <i>uro</i> , to burn – in reference to the stinging properties of most of the species. <i>dioica</i> : Dioecious, ie having the male reproductive organs borne on one plant and the female on another.
Oats	<i>Avena sativa</i>	<i>Avena</i> : Latin <i>avēna</i> , meaning oats – ultimately from the Sanskrit <i>av</i> , to satisfy oneself. <i>sativa</i> : Cultivated.
Olive	<i>Olea europaea</i>	<i>Olea</i> : From the Greek meaning 'olive' and 'smooth'. Alluding to the smoothness of olive oil. <i>europaea</i> : European.
Oregon Grape	<i>Berberis aquifolium</i> (<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>)	<i>Berberis</i> : The Latinized form of the Arabian name for the fruit. <i>Mahonia</i> : Named for Bernard M'Mahon (1775–1816), American horticulturalist and author of <i>The American Gardener's Calendar</i> (1807). <i>aquifolium</i> : * Classical name for holly (Ilex).
Pasque Flower	<i>Pulsatilla vulgaris</i> , <i>Anemone pulsatilla</i>	<i>Pulsatilla</i> : From Latin <i>pulso</i> , strike, set in violet motion – its relevance uncertain. <i>Anemone</i> : Often said to be derived from Greek <i>anemos</i> , wind; with which

		there is no evident connection, but more likely a corrupted Greek loan word of Semitic origin referring to the lament for slain Adonis or Naaman, whose scattered blood produced the blood-red <i>Anemone coronaria</i> or Adonis. <i>vulgaris</i> : Common.
Passion Flower	<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>	<i>Passiflora</i> : Latin <i>passio</i> , passion; <i>flos</i> , a flower. The name was given by the early missionaries in South America who thought they saw in the parts of the flower various signs of Christ's crucifixion. The corona became the crown of thorns, the five anthers represented five wounds, the three styles three nails, and so on. <i>incarnata</i> : Flesh-colored.
Pau d'Arco	<i>Tabebuia avellanedae</i> (<i>T. impetiginosa</i>)	<i>Tabebuia</i> : From the native Brazilian name <i>tabebuia</i> or <i>taiaveruia</i> . <i>avellanedae</i> : A suburb in the south of Buenos Aires where the tree was first identified in Argentina, a place named in honor of General Nicolas Avellaneda (1836–1885), a benevolent president of Argentina. <i>impetiginosa</i> : Referring to medicinal use, specifically for impetigo.
Paw Paw	<i>Papaya carica</i> (<i>Carica papaya</i>)	<i>Carica</i> : The Latin name <i>carica</i> , Greek <i>karike</i> , a kind of fig, was transferred to the papaya on account of its fig-like leaves. The word also refers to Caria, a district in Asia Minor, where figs seem to have been extensively cultivated.
Peppermint	<i>Mentha x piperita</i>	<i>Mentha</i> : Latin <i>mentha</i> , Greek <i>minthē</i> for mint. One of the oldest (possibly going back 4000 years) plant names still in use. <i>piperita</i> : Pepper-like, tasting like pepper, hot and shape.
Phyllanthus	<i>Phyllanthus amarus</i>	<i>Phyllanthus</i> : Greek <i>phyllon</i> , a leaf; <i>anthos</i> , a flower. In some species the flowers are produced on the edges of the leaf-like branches. <i>amarus</i> : Bitter.
Pleurisy Root	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	<i>Asclepias</i> : The Greek name, in honor of Asklepiōs, god of medicine, who in Latin was called Aesculāpius. Asklepiōs was generally shown with Hygieia, goddess of wise living, on one side and on the other, Panakeia, goddess of cure-alls. <i>tuberosa</i> : Tuberous.
Poke Root	<i>Phytolacca decandra</i>	<i>Phytolacca</i> : From Greek <i>phyton</i> , a plant; modern Latin <i>lacca</i> , from Hindi <i>lakh</i> , referring to the dye extracted from the lac insect. The allusion is to the staining qualities of the fruit which has been used to redden wine. <i>decandra</i> : With 10 stamens.
Polygala	<i>Polygala tenuifolia</i>	<i>Polygala</i> : Latin name from the Greek name, <i>pōlygalōn</i> , from <i>pōlys</i> , much; <i>gala</i> , milk – they were reputed to aid the secretion of milk. <i>tenuifolia</i> : Slender-leaved.
Polygonum	<i>Polygonum multiflorum</i>	<i>Polygonum</i> : From the Greek name, <i>pōlygōnon</i> , from <i>polys</i> , many, much; and either <i>gōnōs</i> , offspring, seed (in allusion to the numerous seeds) or <i>gōny</i> , knee-joint (in allusion to the swollen joints of the stems). <i>multiflorum</i> : Many-flowered.
Prickly Ash	<i>Zanthoxylum clava-herculis</i>	<i>Zanthoxylum</i> : Green <i>xanthos</i> , yellow; <i>xylon</i> , wood – form the color of the heartwood of some species. <i>clava-herculis</i> : Club of Hercules.
Psyllium	<i>Plantago ovata</i>	<i>Plantago</i> : Refer to Ribwort. <i>ovata</i> : Ovate; egg-shaped, with the broad end at the base.
Qing Hao	<i>Artemisia annua</i>	<i>Artemisia</i> : Refer to Wormwood. <i>annua</i> : Annual.
Raspberry	<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	<i>Rubus</i> : The Latin <i>rubus</i> , bramble bush; from <i>ruber</i> , red. The fruits of some species give a red dye. <i>idaeus</i> : Of Mount Ida, Crete, less often Asia Minor.
Red Clover	<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	<i>Trifolium</i> : The Latin name, from <i>tri-</i> , three; <i>folium</i> , a leaf – because of the trifoliate leaves. <i>pratense</i> : Of the meadows.
Rehmannia	<i>Rehmannia glutinosa</i>	<i>Rehmannia</i> : Named for Joseph Rehmann (1753–1831), German physician, who settled in St Petersburg. <i>glutinosa</i> : Sticky, gluey, glutinous.
Rhodiola	<i>Rhodiola rosea</i> (<i>Sedum rosea</i> , <i>Sedum roseum</i>)	<i>Rhodiola</i> : Latin diminutive (eg a compounded, derived word) of Greek <i>rhōdon</i> , rose – referring to the rose-scented roots of the type species known as <i>Rhodia Radix</i> or <i>Rosea Radix</i> by the old herbalists.

		<i>Sedum</i> : Latin name used by the ancients for various succulents, from <i>sedo</i> , to sit – from the manner in which some species grow on rocks and walls. <i>rosea, roseum</i> : Rose-like.
Rhubarb	<i>Rheum palmatum</i>	<i>Rheum</i> : The Greek name for the roots and rhizome imported from Iran was <i>rhēōn</i> or <i>rha</i> , whence the names <i>Rhaponticum</i> , meaning the <i>rha</i> of Pontus, and <i>Rhabarbarum</i> , the <i>rha</i> of the foreigners or barbarians. These names probably derive from Iranian <i>rēwās</i> . In the palmy days of the China trade (1800–1850), the best medicinal rhubarb was exported from Canton. <i>palmatum</i> : Palmate ie lobed like a hand with fully outspread fingers.
Ribwort	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	<i>Plantago</i> : From the Latin <i>plantāgo</i> , plantain; perhaps from <i>planta</i> , sole of the foot. Alluding to the shape of the leaves. <i>lanceolata</i> : Lanceolate, spear-shaped, ie of narrow shape with curved sides tapering to a point.
Rosehips	<i>Rosa canina</i>	<i>Rosa</i> : Latin name for rose (of oriental origin). <i>canina</i> : Pertaining to dogs; applied metaphorically to an inferior kind, eg a scentless as opposed to a scented species.
Rosemary	<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	<i>Rosmarinus</i> : Latin name derived from <i>ros</i> , dew; <i>marinus</i> , maritime. It is found wild on sea cliffs in southern Europe. <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Sage	<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	<i>Salvia</i> : The Latin name, presumably derived from <i>salvus</i> , safe, well, sound – alluding to the healing properties of sage. <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Sarsaparilla	<i>Smilax ornata</i>	<i>Smilax</i> : The Greek name for these climbers. Another reference suggests it is derived from <i>smile</i> , a scraper – the stems are rough from prickles. <i>ornata</i> : Ornamental, showy.
Saw Palmetto	<i>Serenoa serrulata</i> (<i>Sabal serrulata, Serenoa repens</i>)	<i>Serenoa</i> : Named for Sereno Watson (1826–1892) of Harvard University, distinguished American botanist who named and described many of the new species found during the pioneer botanical exploration of western and middle North America. <i>Sabal</i> : Possibly from the South American name for these spineless palms. <i>serrulata</i> : With small saw-like teeth. <i>repens</i> : Creeping.
Schisandra	<i>Schisandra chinensis, Schizandra chinensis</i>	<i>Schisandra, Schizandra</i> : Greek <i>schizo</i> , to divide; <i>aner, andros</i> , male – in allusion to the well separated anther cells. <i>chinensis</i> : Chinese.
Senna	<i>Cassia</i> spp.	<i>Cassia</i> : The Greek name for a genus of leguminous plants. (Origin may be Hebrew, and latinized by Cassia.)
Shatavari	<i>Asparagus racemosus</i>	<i>Asparagus</i> : Classical name for the plant (asparagus), which was well known to the ancients. Another reference suggests it is derived from <i>a</i> , intensive; <i>sparasso</i> , to tear; as some of the species are armed with strong prickles. <i>racemosus</i> : With flowers in racemes.
Sheep Sorrel	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	<i>Rumex</i> : The Latin <i>rumex</i> , sorrel; from <i>rumex</i> , lanceolate. Alluding to the form of the leaf and the pointed pods. <i>acetosella</i> : Pre-Linnaean name for common sorrel and other plants with acid leaves. From <i>acētum</i> , vinegar.
Shepherd's Purse	<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i> (previously <i>Thlaspi burs-pastoris</i>)	<i>Capsella</i> : Diminution of capsule. (Capsella is formed with a diminutive suffix (- <i>ella</i>) combined with a noun (possibly <i>capsa</i> , meaning box or <i>capsula</i> , meaning capsule).) <i>Thlaspi</i> : The Greek name for cress. <i>bursa-pastoris</i> : Literal (Latin) translation of shepherd's purse.
Skullcap	<i>Scutellaria lateriflora</i>	<i>Scutellaria</i> : Refer to Chinese Skullcap. <i>lateriflora</i> : On the side of a flower.
Slippery Elm	<i>Ulmus rubra</i>	<i>Ulmus</i> : Latin for elm. <i>rubra</i> : Latin for red.
Soy Bean	<i>Glycine max</i>	<i>Glycine</i> : From Greek <i>glykys</i> , sweet – in allusion to the sweetness of the roots and leaves of some species, none of which begins to compare in importance with the soybean (<i>G. max</i>). Quick to mature, drought-resistant and easy to grow, this plant has been in cultivation for at least 3000 years in eastern Asia.
Spiny Jujube	<i>Zizyphus spinosa</i>	<i>Zizyphus</i> : From the Persian name for jujube, <i>zīzfūm</i> or <i>zīzafūn</i> . <i>spinosa</i> : Spiny.
Squaw Vine	<i>Mitchella repens</i>	<i>Mitchella</i> : An evergreen trailing herb named for John Mitchell (1711–1768),

		physician of Virginia, born in Lancaster county, who was a correspondent of Linnaeus. <i>repens</i> : Creeping.
St John's Wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	<i>Hypericum</i> : The Greek name <i>hypereikon</i> is supposed to be from either <i>ereike</i> , heath or <i>hyper</i> , above; <i>eikon</i> , picture – the plant was supposed to keep evil spirits at bay, in revenge for which the Devil pierced the leaves with a needle. The flowers of some species were placed above images to ward off evil at the ancient midsummer festival Walpurgisnacht, which later became the feast of St John (24th June), when they are in flower. <i>perforatum</i> : Having or appearing to have small holes.
Stemona	<i>Stemona sessilifolia</i>	<i>Stemona</i> : Greek <i>stemon</i> , stamen – referring to the protruding and foliaceous stamens. <i>sessilifolia</i> : With sessile (stalkless) leaves.
Sundew	<i>Drosera longifolia</i>	<i>Drosera</i> : From Greek <i>drōsērōs</i> , dewy – in allusion to the gland-tipped hairs on the leaves which give a dewy appearance to these carnivorous plants. <i>longifolia</i> : Long-leaved.
Tangerine, Chen Pi	<i>Citrus reticulata</i>	<i>Citrus</i> : Latin name for the citron (<i>Citrus medica</i>), the fruit of which was substituted in ancient Jewish ritual for the cone of the cedar (<i>Cedrus libani</i>) which had detested associations with Bacchus (Dionysos), but applied by Linnaeus and earlier authors to the whole genus. <i>reticulata</i> : Netted; with a net-like pattern.
Thuja	<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>	<i>Thuja</i> : The Greek name <i>thuiā</i> , for a kind of juniper. <i>occidentalis</i> : Western.
Thyme	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	<i>Thymus</i> : From the Greek meaning 'to burn in sacrifice'. The plant was so used because of its aroma. <i>vulgaris</i> : Common.
Tribulus	<i>Tribulus terrestris</i>	<i>Tribulus</i> : From <i>treis</i> , three, and <i>ballo</i> , to project – each carpel is armed with three, and sometimes four prickly points. <i>terrestris</i> : Of the ground, growing in the ground as opposed to growing on trees or in water.
True Unicorn	<i>Aletris farinosa</i>	<i>Aletris</i> : Greek <i>alētris</i> , the female slave who ground the meal. The plants appear to be covered in a powdery dust. <i>farinosa</i> : Mealy, powdery.
Turmeric	<i>Curcuma longa</i>	<i>Curcuma</i> : The Latinized version of the Arabic name (<i>kurkum</i>). <i>longa</i> : Long.
Tylophora	<i>Tylophora indica</i>	<i>Tylophora</i> : From <i>tylos</i> , a swelling, and <i>phoreo</i> , to bear – alluding to the ventricose pollen masses. <i>indica</i> : Literally of India but also applied to plants originating throughout the East Indies and from as far away as China. It seems as if any plant that came home in an Indiaman (ship engaged in trade with India or the East Indies) might be given this specific epithet without further ado.
Uva Ursi	<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	<i>Arctostaphylos</i> : Greek <i>arktos</i> , a bear; <i>ous</i> , <i>otos</i> , an ear. The scales of the pappus (tuft of hair/bristles on the end of fruits) are supposed to look like the ears of a bear. <i>uva-ursi</i> : Bear's grape.
Valerian	<i>Valeriana officinalis</i>	<i>Valeriana</i> : Refer to Mexican Valerian. <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Vervain	<i>Verbena officinalis</i>	<i>Verbena</i> : The Latin name for leaves and shoots of laurel, myrtle etc, used in religious ceremonies and also in medicine. Said to be from its Celtic name, <i>Ferfaen</i> . <i>officinalis</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Violet	<i>Viola odorata</i>	<i>Viola</i> : The Latin name for various sweet-scented flowers, such as violets, and derived from the same source as the Greek <i>ion</i> (which in its earlier form had an initial letter corresponding to <i>v</i> or <i>w</i> , which was later lost). <i>odorata</i> : Fragrant.
White Horehound	<i>Marrubium vulgare</i>	<i>Marrubium</i> : The classic Latin name for horehound. Another reference suggests it derives from <i>marrob</i> , a Hebrew word, signifying a bitter juice – in allusion to the extreme bitterness of the plants. <i>vulgare</i> : Common.
White Peony	<i>Paeonia lactiflora</i>	<i>Paeonia</i> : The classical Greek name said to commemorate Paeon (Paiōn), physician of the gods and reputed discoverer of its medicinal properties, which according, however, to one version, were revealed to him by Leto. The name

		is possibly derived from the word <i>paio</i> (I strike) and the incantation <i>ἱεραῖῶν</i> uttered by the medical practitioner. We still speak of a paeon or song of praise, originally a hymn to Apollo. <i>lactiflora</i> : With milk-white flowers.
Wild Cherry	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	<i>Prunus</i> : From the Greek meaning 'plum-tree'. <i>serotina</i> : Late in flowering or ripening.
Wild Yam	<i>Dioscorea villosa</i>	<i>Dioscorea</i> : Named in honor of Pedanios Dioscorides, 1st-century Greek physician and herbalist who compiled <i>Materia Medica</i> which was the most important work on medicinal herbs throughout the Middle Ages. <i>villosa</i> : Covered with soft hairs.
Willow Bark	<i>Salix alba</i> , <i>Salix purpurea</i>	<i>Salix</i> : Latin for willow. From the Celtic <i>sal</i> , near; and <i>lis</i> , water – alluding to its place of growth. <i>alba</i> : White, particularly a dull rather than a glossy white. <i>purpurea</i> : Purple. (See also <i>Echinacea purpurea</i> .)
Willow Herb	<i>Epilobium parviflorum</i>	<i>Epilobium</i> : From Greek <i>ἐπί</i> , upon; <i>lobos</i> , a pod. The petals surmount the podlike ovary. <i>parviflorum</i> : With small flowers.
Witch Hazel	<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>	<i>Hamamelis</i> : The Greek name for a plant with a pear-shaped fruit, possibly the medlar. From <i>hama</i> , with; <i>melon</i> , an apple – the fruit accompanies the flower. <i>virginiana</i> : Of Virginia, USA, named for Queen Elizabeth I, England's 'Virgin Queen'.
Wood Betony	<i>Stachys betonica</i> (<i>S. officinalis</i> , previously <i>Betonica officinalis</i>)	<i>Stachys</i> : Greek <i>stachys</i> , ear of corn; but by extension of application used by Dioscorides and Pliny for a Labiate presumably with a similar inflorescence. Another suggestion: derived from <i>stachys</i> , a spike – the mode of flowering. <i>Betonica</i> : Variant of <i>Vettonica</i> , name of a plant which grew in Spain. Or derived from <i>beutonic</i> , its Celtic name. <i>officinale</i> : Sold in shops; applied to plants with medicinal properties.
Wormwood	<i>Artemisia absinthium</i>	<i>Artemisia</i> : Named in honor of Artēmis, the Greek goddess of chastity. <i>absinthium</i> : Latin and pre-Linnaean name for wormwood. In biblical days it was a symbol of calamity and sorrow.
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	<i>Achillea</i> : The Greek name honors Achilles, heroic warrior of the Trojan wars. As a youth he was taught the properties of this plant in healing wounds. <i>millefolium</i> : Many-leaved; literally, with a thousand leaves.
Yellow Dock	<i>Rumex crispus</i>	<i>Rumex</i> : Refer to Sheep Sorrel. <i>crispus</i> : Finely waved; closely curled.

Table 1. The meaning of botanical names of selected herbs (specific epithet provided where available), including some current and historical botanical synonyms.

? information not available from cited references; educated guess; information presented from closely related Latin words or from unreferenced material.

* Information taken from the generic name.

References: The major reference for this material is *Stearn's Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners*,¹ with some information supplied by other main sources.^{2,13,14,15} Other citations were used for *methysticum*,¹⁶ *avellaneda*,¹⁷ *impetiginosa*,¹⁷ *agnus*,¹⁸ *camporum*.¹⁹

Acknowledgment

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