

# Dealing with Botanical Names

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## Pronunciation

In general, the pronunciation of Latin botanical names requires little extra effort. They look strange, and many are strange—being botanical Latin, an amalgam of Latin words and latinized forms of words from other languages (especially Greek) and proper names. The trick is to scan the word, divide it into syllables, and then pronounce each syllable distinctly and confidently! Whether your pronunciation is right or wrong may depend on the background and preferences of your listener. But whether or not your vowel values and stresses are those of the listener, in almost all cases you will be understood.

Two widely available guides to pronunciation are the "Pronunciations" column in *The American Gardener* (American Horticultural Society), and the *New Pronouncing Dictionary of Plant Names* (American Nurseryman Publishing Company). Coombes' *Dictionary of Plant Names* provides British preferences in the matter. For a thorough treatment of botanical Latin, readers can do no better than to consult Stearn's *Botanical Latin* (1992a).

As you become acquainted with the Latin plant names and learn their origins, many of the pronunciation problems will resolve themselves. For example, consider the following epithets in adjectival form that identify the geographical origin of certain plants. Note especially the endings; remember that an epithet in adjectival form must agree in gender with the genus name.

Gender			
masculine	<i>californicus</i>	<i>americanus</i>	<i>canadensis</i>
feminine	-----a	-----a	-----is
neuter	-----um	-----um	-----e

Once these endings are familiar, the pronunciation of many unfamiliar, but structurally similar, names becomes easier; e.g., *lusitanicus* (pertaining to Portugal), *neapolitanus* (pertaining to Naples), and *parisiensis* (pertaining to Paris).

The pronunciation of the suffix *-ense* or the epithet *molle* (neuter in gender) sometimes raises the question of whether the final "e" should be silent or sounded. Because it is an essential element that here specifies neuter gender, it should be voiced. (The masculine and feminine forms are respectively *-ensis* and *mollis*.)

Another situation is often accorded different treatment by different botanists; namely, pronunciation of the suffix *-oides* connoting similarity. Coombes treats this "oi" as a diphthong (pronounced as in "adenoid"). Stearn (1992a) points out that, based on the Greek derivation of this suffix, the "oi" should be pronounced as two elements. The "o" becomes part of the stem of the word to which it is attached and the "ides" contributes the meaning of resemblance. For example, *hippophaeoides* would be "hi-po-fa-ee-OI-deez" according to Coombes and "hi-po-fa-ee-o-I-deez" according to Stearn. (Coombes uses underscored characters for stressed syllables; in this note, these have been changed to capital letters.)

Because some readers of this journal find the pronunciation of botanical names confusing or even forbidding, the Society's "answer-man-in-chief" recently suggested the desirability of listing in **THE AZALEAN** the correct pronunciations of Latin specific epithets for azaleas. The author of this note replied that the task would be difficult because of variations in practice, some of which reflect national usages. The present note is intended to provide background information on several of the problems encountered when one attempts to specify pronunciation of botanical names. The author is not a linguist, and the discussion only samples the issues involved. We may be thankful that the ambiguities affecting pronunciation are not often encountered in the spelling of botanical names.

Through the generous cooperation of The American Horticultural Society, we are able to present a number of suggested pronunciations from the "Pronunciations" column in *The American Gardener*.

More generally, Stearn points out that in Latin every vowel is pronounced, and he gives as an example *Cotoneaster*, which is shown in Coombes' notation as "ko-ton-ee-A-ster." (For an exception, see below for discussion of diphthongs.)

There is a tendency for Europeans to use short, or soft, vowels, while in the United States there is more use of long, or hard, vowels. A simple example is *nana*, meaning dwarf and sometimes found as an intraspecific epithet. While Coombes calls for "NAH-na," many if not most in this country use "NA-na." Stearn (1992) tells us that even professional botanists do not conform to a uniform practice:

How they [botanical names of plants] are pronounced matters little provided they sound pleasant and are understood by all concerned. This is most likely to be attained by pronouncing them in accordance with the rules of classical Latin pronunciation. There are, however, several systems, since people tend to pronounce Latin words by analogy with words of their own language. . .

In English-speaking countries there exist two main systems, the traditional English pronunciation generally used by gardeners and botanists and the 'reformed' or 'restored' academic pronunciation adopted by classical scholars... This academic pronunciation comes closer to the usual Latin pronunciation of Continental people than does the conventional English pronunciation.

Stearn provides a table comparing the reformed academic and traditional English pronunciations of various letters and diphthongs. Perfectionists should consult this table. Diphthongs such as "ae" and "oe" used to be printed as ligatures (with the two letters run together into a single character—for example, look at the title page in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*). According to Stearn, diphthongs are to be treated as long vowels. For example, in reformed academic, the sound of "ae" is given as *ai* in *aisle*, of "oe" as *oi* in *toil*; in traditional English, "ae" as *ea* in *meat*, "oe" as *ee* in *bee*. Current practice often drops the first letter of the diphthong; resulting, for example, in "encyclopedia."

The letter "c" causes trouble. Stearn states that in the reformed academic version it is always pronounced as in "cat"; in the traditional English version, it varies according to the following vowel—thus "before a, o, u as in cat; before e, i, y as in centre." The latter practice is followed in the *New*

*Pronouncing Dictionary of Plant Names* and is recommended by the author. Coombes adopts the reformed academic path, pronouncing with a "k" sound whatever vowel follows the "c"—a practice far less euphonious if marginally easier to remember.

Remember: scan the word, divide it into syllables, then pronounce each syllable distinctly and confidently! Practice pronouncing unfamiliar ones and they will soon become familiar.

#### Transliteration

Variant spelling of plant names may be encountered, especially in the latinization of personal or geographical names. The transliteration of words from one language to another is subject to various approaches. One issue is the use of diacritical marks. In German to English translation, for example, one is confronted by umlauts on certain vowels in the German text. If these are not available in a particular font or software package being used, does one add an "e" following the vowel to indicate that it is umlauted, or simply forget about the umlaut? Similarly, the dropping of accents from French text may seem an expedient solution, but it will arouse violent reactions from Francophones. Indeed, in both of these examples, the omission of diacritics leads to mispronunciation unless the reader is familiar with the original language. The most complex problems arise when attempting to render in roman characters names that are represented by ideographs in a language such as Chinese or Japanese.

Transliteration of Russian (or other Slavic) names from Cyrillic to the roman alphabet varies from country to country and sometimes within a country! Brummitt and Powell (1992) refer to "an example of one Russian author whose name was transliterated in four different ways in four different journals in the same year." Brummitt and Powell have tried in their work to use the transliteration preferred by the individual whose name is transliterated.

Although the spelling of a botanical name in Latin form is almost always fixed permanently once it is validly published, the orthography of the author's name may change. One reason for such a change is to guide readers toward correct pronunciation.

An example of the difficulty encountered in rendering a personal name is met with in the roman version of the name of an eminent Russian botanist of German extraction who traveled in Japan in the early 1860s and published names of several new *Rhododendron* species in 1870. Stearn (1992b) presents the name in traditional West European transliteration and then explicitly gives the pronunciation—which differs from the usual English pronunciation of some of the letters: "Maximowicz... pronounced 'Maksimovich'". The "w" in German leads to a "v" sound in English. The Edinburgh botanists who recently revised nomenclature in *Rhododendron* have changed their practice and are spelling the name "Maximovicz." Transliteration using U.S. standards renders the name "Maximovich," leading the English-speaker to the "v" sound as well as to the "ch" sound as in "lunch"—the correct pronunciation of the Cyrillic characters. (I have never been able to wrap my tongue around "cz.")

Another example shows how a Latin-form botanical name can lead to mispronunciation because of the transliteration system adopted: *R. sichotense* Pojarkova. The specific epithet is derived from the name of mountains in Russia's Far East, the Sikhote-Alin' range. The U.S. Library of Congress—American Library Association (LC-ALA) table and the U.S. Board of Geographic Names (BGN) table both lead to "sikhotense" instead of the "sichotense" adopted by European botanists. The "ch" may lead the English-language reader to an incorrect sound like that in "chocolate" while the sound of the Russian character in the name is better represented by "kh"—as in the initial Cyrillic letter of "Khrushchev." The author of the spe-

cies would also be rendered differently following U.S. practice: Poyarkova (BGN) or Poiarkova (LC-ALA). To many U.S. readers, "ja" here leads to "JA" as in "jar"; but to Europeans, it leads to the more appropriate "YA" as in "yard."

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## Pronunciation of Selected *Azalea* Epithets

<u>Taxon</u>	<u><i>The American Gardener</i></u>
<i>Rhododendron</i>	ro-doh-DEN-dron
Subg. <i>Pentanthera</i> [Deciduous azaleas]	pen-TAN-theh-ruh
<i>alabamense</i> From Alabama	ah-luh-ba-MEN-see
<i>arborescens</i> Woody, sometimes tree-like	ar-bo-RES-enz
<i>atlanticum</i> From the Atlantic Coast of N. Amer. (also used in other genera for plants from the Atlas Mts. of N. Afr.)	at-LAN-tih-kum
<i>austrinum</i> Southern	aw-STRY-num
<i>calendulaceum</i> Similar in color to <i>Calendula</i>	kuh-len-dew-LAY-see-um
<i>canadense</i> Canadian or, in older works, from NE North America	kan-a-DEN-see
<i>canescens</i> With grayish-white hairs	kuh-NES-enz
<i>cumberlandense</i> From the Cumberland Mountains and Plateau	kum-bur-lan-DEN-see
<i>flammeum</i> Flame-colored	FLAM-ee-um
<i>japonicum</i> Japanese	ja-PON-i-kum
<i>luteum</i> Yellow (flowers)	LOO-tee-um
<i>molle</i> With soft hairs	MOL-lee
<i>occidentale</i> Western	ahk-sih-den-TAL-ee
<i>periclymenoides</i> Similar to honeysuckle	pair-ih-kly-meh-NOY-deez
<i>prinophyllum</i> With leaves bearing a resemblance to those of <i>Prinos</i> , a Linnaean genus that included the plants now known as <i>Ilex glabra</i> and <i>Ilex verticillata</i>	prin-o-FIL-um
<i>prunifolium</i> With plum-like leaves	prew-nih-FO-lee-um
<i>schlippenbachii</i> After Schlippenbach, Russian naval officer and traveler (mid 19 <sup>th</sup> Cent.)	shlip-en-BACH-ee-eye

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## PRIZE FOR BEST ARTICLE IN THE AZALEAN—1998

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In 1989, the Board of Governors authorized the editor of **THE AZALEAN** to establish an annual prize for the best article to appear in **THE AZALEAN**. The concept was to acquire through donations, a fund which when invested would provide an annual prize for the best article published in **THE AZALEAN**. Funds were donated by the following chapters to establish the "CHAPTERS' PRIZE":

**Tri-State  
Richmond Virginia  
Ben Morrison,  
Northern Virginia  
and Brookside Gardens**

As stated in the September 1990 issue, the best article each year will be selected by a poll of the membership. The prize will be announced and awarded at the Annual Meeting of the Society.

A ballot for the prize for 1998 is on the wrapper of this issue. PLEASE VOTE.

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## Back Issues of THE AZALEAN

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Details of how to obtain complete sets of back issues of **THE AZALEAN** at bargain prices are still being worked out. This will be an opportunity for members, new and old to obtain their own copies of the journal of the Society back to its beginning in 1979. These issues are a great source of information for growers, landscapers, and nurserymen to say nothing about their importance to those of us who love azaleas.

<i>vaseyi</i> After Vasey, U.S. botanist (mid- to late 19 <sup>th</sup> Cent.)	VAY'-see-eye
<i>viscosum</i> Sticky	viss-KO-sum
Subg. <i>Tsutsusi</i> [Evergreen azaleas]	tsu-TSU-see
' <i>Amoenum</i> ' Pleasant, delightful	a-MEE-num
<i>dilatatum</i> Expanded	dil-a-TAY-tum
<i>eriocarpum</i> Wooly fruited	eh-ree-o-KAR-pum
<i>indicum</i> From India (or the Far East)	IN-dih-kum
<i>kaempferi</i> After Engelbert Kaempfer, German physician in Japan with Dutch East India Company; described many Japanese plants (ca. 1700)	KEMP-fer-eye
<i>kiusianum</i> From Kyushu, Japan	kee-oo-see-AY-num
<i>macrosepalum</i> With long sepals	mak-ro-SEE-pah-lum
<i>mucronatum</i> With hard point at leaf apex	mew-kro-NAY-tum
<i>nakaharae</i> After Nakahara, Japanese collector of Taiwanese plants (ca. 1900)	na-kah-HAR-ee
<i>oldhamii</i> After Oldham, Kew gardener and plant collector in Orient (mid 19 <sup>th</sup> Cent.)	old-HAM-ee-eye
<i>poukhanense</i> Of Poukhan-san, Korea	poo-kah-NEN-see
<i>scabrum</i> Rough	SKAY-brum
<i>serpyllifolium</i> With thyme-like leaves	ser-pil-li-FO-lee-um
<i>simsii</i> After Sims, editor of Curtis's Botanical Magazine (early 1800s)	SIMS-ee-eye
<i>tashiroi</i> After Tashiro, Japanese botanist (late 19 <sup>th</sup> Cent.)	tah-SHEE-ro-eye
<i>weyrichii</i> After Weyrich, Russian naval surgeon who botanized in Japan and E. Asia (mid 19 <sup>th</sup> Cent.)	way-RIKH-ee-eye
<i>yedoense</i> From Tokyo (Edo), Japan	yeh-doh-EN-see