



Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article

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Pictured is *Pavonia lasiopetala*. Some of its common names are: Rock rose, Texas swamp-mallow, Wright pavonia, and Rose mallow

Latin is Not Dead

by Lydia Holley

Some gardeners love using common names for their plants. The names are usually cute, sometimes descriptive, and easily remembered. Some gardeners believe that using the latin name for plants makes you seem uppity, snooty, or like a know-it-all. Other gardeners resist learning latin names for plants because they are harder to remember, and much harder to pronounce.



But if you want to purchase the right plant that you admired in someone else's garden, knowing the latin name is imperative. So many different plants go by the same common name, you may end up with a much different plant if you only search using the common name. Or you may never find the plant you're searching for.

For instance, I once purchased a plant labeled only as 'Rock Rose'. This plant was new to me at the time, and the label did not contain the latin name. So, when I began researching 'Rock Rose', the *Cistus* plant, which is commonly known as Rock Rose, is all that I could find. But my plant did not fit the description of a *Cistus*, so I kept looking. Finally, after numerous days and hours of searching, I found what I was looking for: *Pavonia lasiopetala*. All those hours of frustration could have been prevented if only I had known the plant's latin name.

I have been known to talk to someone for several minutes about moonflowers, only to realize that I was referring to *Ipomoea alba* and they were asking about *Datura*, both which are commonly called moonflowers. Of course, there are also some *Oenotheras* that are known as moonflowers, so you see how confusing it can be.

Using latin names for plants is not for showing off; it's for accuracy and proper identification. You can call a plant darling, darling. But sometimes you need to call it by its proper name.

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