



# Trowel Talk!

January, 2010

## What's in a Name

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet – or so said William Shakespeare; but what about a *Matthiola longipetala* or *Mirabilis jalapa*? If you are asking yourself, "a WHAT?" you are probably not alone. Many gardeners don't bother with a plant's Latin name because it seems long-winded and, quite simply, foreign to them. But these complex names serve a purpose and tell us so much about the plant. Common names leave room for error; consider the potted geranium whose Latin name is *Pelargonium*. The true *Geranium* is a perennial and a very different plant.

The system for naming plants dates back to the mid-1700s when Swedish botanist, Carl Linnaeus developed a system of naming plants that consists of two names (a binomial system). The first name is the genus and the second name the species. As an example, take *Rosa rugosa* and *Rosa moschata*. In this case *Rosa* means rose, *rugosa* means rugose or wrinkled and *moschata* means musk. So, in this case, we have two different roses; one with wrinkled, leathery leaves and the other with a musk scent.

The species name is usually descriptive and is sometimes referred to as the specific epithet. Having a basic understanding of these names is

useful because they give you clues to the plant's characteristics and origins. Here are just a few of the many descriptive names.

Some describe the features of the plant such as height, shape or growth habits. The size of the plant will be evident from *nanus* (dwarf) or *giganteus* (very large); the shape of the plant or its foliage are described by *globosus* (round, globular), *mollis* (soft, flexible), *gracillimus* (very slender); and the style of growth by *muralis* (growing on walls), *prostratus* (prostrate or flat on the ground), and *erectus* (growing upright).

For a hint about the plant's colour, look for *albus* (white), *flavus* (yellow), *purpureus* (purple), *roseus* (pink), *rubrus* (red), *zebrinus* (striped) and *maculatus* (spotted).

To discover a plant's original growing environment, consider *alpinus* (alpine), *saxatilis* (found among rocks), *rivularis* (growing by streams), *canadensis* (from Canada), *chinensis* (from China), *graecus* (from Greece), etc.

A plant's name can tell us its uses. *Officinalis* means people used this plant for medicinal purposes, e.g. *Salvia officinalis*. A plant with *tinctorius* in the name can be used for tinting or dyeing, e.g. *Anthemis tinctoria*. Maple syrup is a product from the *Acer saccharum* or sugar maple with *saccharum* meaning 'of sugar'.

Would you rather buy a plant that is *horridus* (very prickly) or *gloriosus* (glorious, superb)? You would probably want to avoid a *Croton hircinus* (smelling like a goat), but might enjoy a *Dodecatheon pulchellum* (pretty, beautiful) close to the house. Oh, and definitely avoid eating an *emeticus* or vomit causing species such as *Trichilia emetica*.

So, what's in a name? *Matthiola longipetala* (long petaled) or evening scented stocks and the *Mirabilis jalapa* (marvelous from Mexico) or four o'clocks would be just as *fragrantissimus* as any rose, regardless of their names.

Mary Ann Van Berlo  
Master Gardener

## Trowel Talk!

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 1, Number 1
- <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>
- [editor@mgottawa.mgoi.ca](mailto:editor@mgottawa.mgoi.ca)



*Sedum spectabile* 'Autumn Joy' still looks "spectacular" even in the winter



## Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

### Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

#### ONGOING:

**Telephone Help Line:** 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1-3 pm

**E-mail Help Line:** mgoc\_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

#### SPEAKING EVENTS:

**Better Gardening for Less Money** – Jan 19, 2010 – 7:30

Speaker: Lee Boltwood, Master Gardener  
Pretty Street Community Centre, 2 Pretty St., Stittsville  
Hosted by Stittsville Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**The 100 kilometre diet** – Feb 9, 2010 – 7:30

Speaker: David Hinks, Master Gardener  
Carp Memorial Hall, Carp Road at Donald B. Munro Road, Carp  
Hosted by West Carleton Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**Vertical Gardens – Up and down the walls, with vines, trailers and creepers** – Feb 9, 2010 – 7:30

Speaker: Mary Reid, Master Gardener  
Southminster United Church, 15 Aylmer Avenue, Ottawa  
Hosted by Old Ottawa South Garden Club (guests welcome)

**Tips, Tricks & Techniques** – Feb 17, 2010 – 7:00

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener  
St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, 319 Prescott Street, Kemptville  
Hosted by Kemptville Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**Waterwise Gardening** – March 9, 2010 – 7:30

Speaker: Nancy Seppala, Master Gardener  
Southminster United Church, 15 Aylmer Avenue, Ottawa  
Hosted by Old Ottawa South Garden Club (guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

### January TO DO List

- Take time to drool over garden catalogues
- order seeds & plants
- make a plant wish list
- make renovation plans for garden beds
- research new plants
- start cold stratification for seeds requiring a period of cold to break their dormancy (follow package instructions)

### About Master Gardeners

A Master Gardener is a trained horticulturist who volunteers a minimum of 30 hours per year to help homeowners with their gardening questions.

The Master Gardener program began in 1972 in the state of Washington, USA.

The program came to Ontario in 1985 with Ottawa-Carleton being one of the founding groups joining in 1986.

There are approximately 850 Master Gardeners, operating in 38 not-for-profit groups across Ontario. Master Gardeners contribute over 37,000 hours of volunteer time to their communities per year.



Aphids on a Hibiscus blossom

### Tip of the Month:

Control pests on houseplants by checking them each time you wa-

ter. Take action at the first sign of an infestation.

Aphids and white flies can be controlled with insecticidal soap. Spray the plant thoroughly every 5 days, for 20 days – this should catch the pests in all stages of their life cycles.

Mealy bugs and scale should be treated with a q-tip dipped in rubbing alcohol. This is a slow process as each site of infestation must be dabbed with the rubbing alcohol.

A yellow sticky trap will catch many flying insects such as soil fungus gnats and white flies.