

## **The Origin Of Nomenclature - Why is nomenclature important for Flower Shows?**

You know how some books grab you and you find yourself sneaking a read when you really should be doing something else? I recently found such a book and it opened my eyes to the importance of nomenclature. Who knew there was a page turner out there about the system of organizing and naming plants? Well there is.

*The Brother Gardeners: A Generation of Gentlemen Naturalists and the Birth of an Obsession* by Andrea Wulf, is the true story of avid collectors building the great gardens of Europe and their zeal for the exotic. Wulf describes what may well have been the first real mail-order service for plants. The great colonial American plantsman, John Bartram, persuaded friends in England to “sell” subscriptions of his “seed boxes” to enthusiasts. He would then send along regular shipments filled with his findings from America. This is how many English landscape gardens came to be filled with non-natives.

All seemed well except for the lack of a consistent way to identify the plants. One might receive a box filled with unexpected surprises. Or worse yet, one would order one thing and receive quite another which was especially troublesome since it could take up to six months to get the order. By-the-way, they didn’t exactly have zip-lock bags so the boxes were often compromised on the trip by salt water. This process was extremely slow and to add to the complications, each nurseryman might have their own name for a plant. You see the problem. So along comes this Swede, Carl Linnaeus, who was just bold enough to propose that the entire world use his system of organizing plants and naming them. Long story short...that is exactly what happened and it is the system we use today.

For many of the same reasons the gardening enthusiasts of the 18th century needed nomenclature. Ours is a curious species and we want to know what is before us. As a designer, I need to correctly identify a plant for several reasons. First, knowing the botanical name will ensure that I can correctly re-order it. Second, but probably more important, the public (or other designers) may fall in love with that plant and with proper identification, they can determine how to obtain it or if it can be grown in their climate. This speaks directly to The Garden Club of America’s mission to educate.

Expectations have not changed; whether it was the 1700’s with visions of the magnificent *Magnolia grandiflora*, or today with dreams of inhaling *Gardenia augusta*. To expect either of these plants and receive anything else would define disappointment and reinforce why correct nomenclature is important.

If you have questions or need additional information the Horticulture Committee and the Club’s Horticulture Judges are there to help you.