

How to name a new cultivar



Poplar clone collection at CREA-PLF in Casale Monferrato, Italy
Photo by D. Coaloa



Willow biomass plantation in Syracuse, New York, USA
Photo by J. Kuzovkina

The Special Commission for Cultivar Registration of the International Society for Horticultural Sciences (ISHS) issues an *International Code of Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants* (briefly: Cultivated Plant Code), the currently valid edition being that of 2016.

The Cultivated Plant Code regulates the formation of the "epithet" for plants obtained by a deliberate action of man and put into cultivation. "Action of man" may be artificial hybridization, accidental hybridization, and selection from existing cultivated stock or wild populations that maintains its distinctive characters over time.

Formation of cultivar epithets is described in Article 21 of the Cultivated Plant Code. Here follows a synthesis of the main points relevant to naming cultivars of *Populus* and *Salix*:

1. Fancy names. A cultivar epithet published in or after 1959 must be a fancy name in a modern language, not a botanical term in Latin form. Examples: 'Koster', 'April King', 'Lena'. Old epithets such as 'Marilandica', 'Pendula', 'Robusta', 'Serotina Erecta' would not be acceptable today: they can be retained as they were already in use before 1959.
2. Cryptic codes. Epithets composed of arbitrary sequences of letters and/or numbers are better avoided as they easily lead to errors in transcription. Such epithets as 'I-214' and 'I-154' are retained only because they were already in use before 1959.
3. Punctuation marks are not permitted (after 1996) with the exception of: apostrophe ('), comma (,), up to two exclamation marks (!), the hyphen (-) and the period or full stop (.) (Article 21.18).
4. Length of epithets. Since 1996 an epithet must be made of not more than 30 characters (spaces and demarcation signs do not count) (Article 21.13). Given the above limits of length, a cultivar epithet may be made of any number of words. Each word must have a capital initial, with the exception of conjunctions, prepositions and a word coming after a hyphen (-).

5. Articles, abbreviations, titles. They should be used sparingly as they may lead to confusion. Abbreviations are accepted only if they are widely recognized in the language of origin (e.g. Prof.=Professor, Mr=Mister, St=Saint in English) and the epithet may appear both in the shortened form and in full. Initials of a person's name are admitted but must always appear as such; likewise, if the epithet has a name in full length, initials are not admitted. 'Fritzi Pauley' cannot be shortened to 'F.Pauley'.
6. Forbidden words. The epithet must not consist only of an adjective. The words: "cross", "cultivar", "form", "hybrid", "grex", "group", "improved", "maintenance", "mixture", "mutant", "seedling", "selection", "sport", "strain", "transformed", "variety", or their equivalent in other languages are not permitted (Article 21.16 and 21.17).
7. Epithets incorporating the common name of the species are not accepted after 1996. 'Rudolfschmidtsgraupappel', 'Italpioppo', 'Golden Willow', 'Sweet Willow' would not be acceptable (Article 21.20).
8. Epithets exaggerating the merits of the cultivar are not acceptable after 1996 (Article 21.24).
9. Epithets likely to be confused in spelling or pronunciation with already existing cultivar epithets (parahomonyms) are not accepted after 1996 (Article 21.23).
10. Diacritical signs. The following is neither a rule nor a recommendation of the Cultivated Plant Code but common sense suggests that it be followed: diacritical signs (that is, signs placed on or below letters for phonic purposes) are to be avoided as they are likely to make communications difficult, especially by electronic means. However, they are allowed and, if contained in the first publication of an epithet, they must be conserved.
11. Transliteration into the Latin alphabet (plus the letters W, Y and K) is mandatory for epithets derived from languages with different alphabets (e.g. Greek, Cyrillic, Chinese, Arabic); transliteration is done according to: pinyin for Chinese, Hepburn for Japanese, McCune-Reischauer for Korea, the standards of the US Library of Congress for other languages.
12. Graphical rules. A cultivar epithet, especially when immediately following a botanical or common name, must be clearly distinguished from the latter by enclosing it within single (NOT DOUBLE!) quotation marks. The cultivar epithet CANNOT be printed in italics. The habit of preceding a cultivar epithet by the abbreviation cv. is now abandoned (since 1996).

Examples of **correct** epithets:

P. nigra 'Hamoui',
Populus deltoides Marsh. 'Stoneville Beauty'
Populus 'Boelare'
S. viminalis 'Island'
Salix purpurea L. 'Allegany' *Salix* 'Cristina'

Examples of **wrongly** written epithets:

P. nigra cv. '*Hamoui*' (cultivar epithet in italics and cv. for cultivar, now abandoned)

Salix purpurea L. Allegany (no typographical distinction from the common name)

'Stoneville beauty' (low case first letter in the second word)

"Katrin" (double, instead of single quotation marks)

cv. 'Campeador' (cv., now abandoned)

cl. 'Boelare' (cl. for clone: the means of propagation of the cultivar is irrelevant as far as nomenclature is concerned).

13. Translation into different languages. The spelling of a cultivar epithet must remain unchanged when rendered into another language making use of the Latin alphabet. If an epithet is adapted because unsuitability for marketing purposes (e.g. if the original epithet would be improper or have negative or undesirable connotation or would be difficult to pronounce) the adapted forms are considered trade designations, not cultivar epithets.

Examples:

'2000 Verde' cannot be translated into '2000 Green'

'Luisa Avanzo' cannot become 'Louise Avanzo'

'San Martino' cannot become 'Saint Martin'

'Spijk' (epithet) has the name 'Spike' as a trade designation for Anglophone countries as the pronunciation corresponds to the original Dutch name and is easier to grasp for the common user; however, 'Spike' is NOT an epithet.

As can be seen, most of the rules are dictated by common sense, a virtue that the breeder proposing an epithet for registration should have in mind at all time. Millions of nice and easy fancy epithets exist or may be invented: there is no need to complicate people's lives by devising unnecessarily long or complicated epithets that would lead to confusion, especially when used by those of a different mother language.

A summary of how to form a cultivar name may also be found at:

<http://www.ishs.org/sci/icraname.htm>