

Decoding Botanical Names

Many botanical names describe the plant.

Listed below are some common Latin/Greek adjectives. The adjective reflects the gender of the noun.

Adjectives that end:

-us, er, is are usually masculine

-a, ra, is are usually feminine

-um, rum, e are usually neuter

The adjectives are listed in this order male, female, neuter then the **meaning**.

Botanical Latin plant name example:

Penstemon barbatus (meaning bearded, known as bearded tongue)

acaulis, acaulis, acaule **stemless**

acer, aceris, acre **sharp**

albus, alba, album **white**

alpinus, alpina, alpinum **of the alps**

angustatus, angustata, angustatum

narrow

annuus, annua, annum **annual**

anthus, antha, anthum **flower**

aquaticus, aquatica, aquaticum **water**

arboreus, arborea, arboreum **treelike**

arenarius, arenaria, arenarium **growing in sand**

australis, australis, australe **southern**

autumnalis, autumnalis, autumnale **fall**

barbarus, barbara, barbarum **foreign**

barbatus, barbata, baratum **bearded**

bellus, bella, bellum **beautiful**

brevis, brevis, breve **short**

caeruleus, caerulea caeruleum **sky blue**

campanulatus, campulata, campulatum

bell shape

campestris, campestris, campestre **of**

the fields or plains

canadensis, canadensis, canadense

North American

candidus, candida, candidum **white**

capillaris, capillaris, capillare **slender**

capitatus, capitata, capitatum **dense**

head

cardinalis, cardinalis, cardinale **scarlet**

carpus, carpa, carpum **fruit**

caulis, caulis, caule **with a stem**

chinensis, chinensis, chinense **Chinese**

chrysanthus, chrysantha, chrysanthum

with golden flowers

communis, communis, commune

common

compactus compacta compactum **dense**

cordatus, cordata cordatum **heartshape**

crenatus, crenata, crenatum **scalloped**

decurrens **running down the stem**

denataus, dentata, dentatum **teeth**

digitalis, digitalis, digitale **finger like**

divaricatus divaricata divaricatum,

spreading, straggling

duplicatus, duplicata, duplicatum

double

durus, dura, durum **hard**

echinatus, echinata, echinatum **prickles**

like a hedge hog

elatus, elata, elatum **tall**

eseulentus, esculenta, esculentum

edible

fabaceus, fabacea, fabaceum **bean like**

facetus, faceta, facetum **elegant**

fastigiatus fastigiata, fastigiatum

narrowly upright

floridus, florida floridum **flowering**

abundantly

florus, flora, florum **flower**

foetidus, foetida, foetidum **foul**

smelling

fruticosus, fruticosa, fruticosum

shrubby

glaber, glabra, glabrum **smooth**

gracilis, gracilis, gracile **slender**

griseus, grisea, griseum **gray**

hirtus, hirta, hirtum **hairy**

humilis, humilis, humile **dwarf**

japonicus, japonica, japonicum

Japanese

involutus, involuta, involutum **rolled**

inward

lacteus **milky white**

lanatus, lanata, lanatum **wooly**

luteus, lutea, luteum **yellow**

maculatus, maculata, maculatum

spotted

major, major, majus **larger**

minor, minor, minus **smaller**

mollis, mollis, molle **soft**

montatus, montana, montanum **of the**

mountains

niger, nigra, nigrum **black**
nipponicus, nipponica, nipponicum
Japanese
occidentalis, occidentalis, occidentale
western
odoratus, odorata, odoratum **fragrant**
officinalis, officinalis, officinale
medicinal
palustris, palustris, palustre **of the marsh**
panuculatus, panuculata, panuculatum
with flower in panicles
pedatus, pedata, pedatum **foot like**
phyllus, phylla, phyllum **leaves**
praecox- **very early**
pratensis pratensis pratense **meadow**
procumbens **prostate, sprawling**
pulcher, pulchra, pulchrum **beautiful**
pumilus, pumila, pumilum **dwarf**
purpureus, purpurea purpureum **purple**
reptans, repens **creeping, spreading**
riparius, riparia, riparium **riverbanks**
rosaceus, rosacea, roseceum **pink**
ruber, rubra, rubrum **red**
sativus, sativa, sativum **cultivated**
scandens **climbing**
sempervirens **evergreen**
simplex **unbranched**
sinensis, sinensis, sinense **Chinese**
speciosus speciosa speciosum **splendid**
spectabilis, spectabilis, spectabile
spectacular
spicatus spicata spicatum **spike flowers**

stellatus, stellata, stellatum **star-like**
sylvaticus, sylvatica, sylvaticum **forest**
vernalis, vernalis, vernale **spring**
viridis, viridis, viride **green**
vulgaris vulgaris vulgare **common**

Common Latin/Greek adjectives used in compound words:
Botanical Latin example: *Kalmia latifolia* (meaning broad leaf)

a- **without**
acu- **sharply pointed**
aloides- **resembling**
angusti- **narrow**
anthus- **flower**
argyro- **silver**
atro- **dark**
auro- **golden**
bi- **two**
brachy- **short**
brevis- **short**
carpus- **fruit**
caulis- **stem**
circum- **around**
contra- **against**
cordi- **heart shape**
cyano- **blue**
dentatus- **tooth**
dermis- **skin/bark**
dis- **apart**
eri- **wooly**
erythro- **denote red**

fili- **threadlike**
florus- **flower**
folius- **leaf**
heter-, hetero- **various or diverse**
holo- **completely**
hymen- **membranous**
hypo- **under**
ipes- **stem**
lasi- **wooly**
lati- **broad**
lept- **slender**
leuco- **white**
longi- **long**
luteo- **yellow**
macro- **large**
mega- **big**
micro- **small**
mono- **single**
multi- **many**
parvi- **small**
petulus- **petal**
plani- **flat**
platy- **broad**
poly- **many**
pseud- **false**
pyllis- **leaf**
re- **again**
sub- **under**
tenui- **slender**
tri- **three**
uni- **one**
viridi- **green**
xanth- **yellow**