

Leaves, Limbs, Needles & Boughs

by Fred Opperman

Tree trivia question: What tree is sought after for containers that are to hold liquids? Answer at the end of the article.

How is a tree named? In order to deal intelligently with trees, to be able to refer to them accurately in writing or in conversation, the tree must have a name. There are basically two names for a tree: the botanical (Latin or Greek derivation) and the common name. An example would be *Acer rubrum* which is the botanical name and the common name which is, Red Maple.



Every tree has a botanical name that world wide it is recognized by. It is the exact same tree in America as it is in New Zealand, half a world away. But the common name in many cases is way different. For a far out example is *Swietenia macrophylla*, which is the species of mahogany. But throughout the countries that grow this tree it is known as: caoba, foja pendula, zopilote de mator pescado, ciruela, cirndillo, dedro mondi, caoba mundi, Guatemalla mahogany, Mexican mahogany and at least another ten or more names. So we need to know the botanical name to be able to discuss and talk about the same tree. (Believe me guys, I got this out of a book, there is no way I would know all those names.)

The botanical name given to a tree, not only names it, but also describes it. Thus each species is given two names. It is assigned to a genus and allotted a specific epithet. As the example of Red Maple is known botanically as *Acer rubrum*; *Acer* is the genus of maples, and *rubrum*, the specific epithet, or description describing the red maple. When writing the generic name is capitalized; the specific epithet may or may not be capitalized. Usually in most writings it is not capitalized.

Most of us do not realize that we are using botanical names in our everyday speech. Some common plant names are the botanical names of the plants, such as: begonia, geranium, chrysanthemum, hydrangea, iris and lotus. Many common names are clearly derived from the scientific names or vice versa, such as juniper for *Juniperus*, pine for *Pinus*, larch is *Larix* and the true cedar is *Cedrus*.

So, what's in a name? A rose is a rose, right? Well, maybe, but we better have the botanical name if we are talking to someone who can't see what we are calling a rose.

Trivia answer: *Quercus alba*, White oak, because the pores are filled with tyloses which do not permit liquids to penetrate.


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