

## A Rose by Any Other Name—Does it Matter?®

Iain Dawson

Registrar, Australian Cultivar Registration Authority, c/o Australian National Botanic Gardens, GPO Box 1777, CANBERRA ACT 2601

**Why do we have international rules for naming plants? Why are there two codes of nomenclature for plants? Who regulates plant names? What are the benefits of stable plant names? How do you construct a cultivated plant name? Where can you find more information?**

### WHAT IS A CULTIVAR?

*“By cultivated plants is meant plants raised in cultivation which differ sufficiently from their wild ancestors or, if taken into cultivation from the wild, are worthy enough of distinction from wild populations for horticultural purposes to merit special names”* W. T. Stearn (1986)

The **cultivar** is the basic grouping, or taxon (= culton), for **cultivated varieties**. The word was coined by L. H. Bailey in 1923 and is now commonly used. Their naming is governed by the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants* (ICNCP), the current version of which was published in 1995. A new version should be published very soon. This is a separate system to that used for wild plants, the *International Code of Botanical Nomenclature* (ICBN).

The rank of *cultivar* (ICNCP) is not the same as the category *variety* or *form* in ICBN. A cultivar name can only be given to cultivated plants whose origin or selection is primarily due to the intentional actions of mankind. Normal forms of plants brought from the wild into cultivation retain the same name (ICBN) and similarly plant forms maintained solely by cultivation practices (e.g., pruning or bonsai) are not eligible for cultivar status. It is important to note that not all plants in cultivation are cultivars, and not all cultivars are in cultivation!

The equivalent of the ICBN *type* is the *standard*. This usually includes a herbarium specimen and a description. The standard may only be a description or illustration and in the case of grain crops it is usually just a sample of seed.

Plants that can be considered as cultivars include:

- Deliberate hybrids
- Accidental hybrids in cultivation
- Selection from existing cultivated stock
- Selection from variants within a wild population and maintained as a recognisable entity solely by continued propagation

### WHAT DOES ACRA DO?

The objectives and purposes of ACRA (Australian Cultivar Registration Authority) are:

- To register, in accordance with the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants, names of cultivars of Australian native plants

- To record the names of all cultivars of Australian native plants and hybrids between Australian and exotic plants (excluding *Rhododendron* and Orchidaceae)
- To encourage the horticultural development of the Australian flora
- To assess and describe cultivars submitted for registration
- To cooperate with other organisations and individuals engaged in activities compatible with these objectives
- To maintain a register, together with correspondence files, herbarium specimens, photographic collections, and any other necessary information on cultivars or groups defined above
- To publish information on Australian plant cultivars

Under the International Code for Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants ACRA is the "International Registration Authority for Australian plant genera excluding those covered by other authorities". This includes all endemic genera and all predominantly Australian genera. We also register all Australian varieties accepted by the Australian Plant Breeders Rights (PBR) Office. There are also some species that belong to genera that are not predominantly Australian which we have accepted registrations for. *Helichrysum*, *Syzygium*, and *Microlaena* are some examples.

ACRA also helps the Plant Breeders Rights Office. All applications for new indigenous cultivars are submitted to ACRA for identification and an assessment of whether or not they are already known. Specimens of new PBR cultivars are also kept in the herbarium, where they are integrated into the cultivar collection kept by ACRA for administrative and user convenience. The herbarium collection will become increasingly important as an aid to checking the novelty of new cultivars.

### **WHY DO WE NEED STABLE PLANT NAMES?**

The primary aim is to promote stable nomenclature. This helps nursery owners to protect their property rights, plant breeders can relate knowledge of genetics to plant material, taxonomists know what they are working with, communicators can have more confidence in the information they publish, retailers can source plant material, and the general public can link their purchases to published information on gardening. For the trade user we believe that the use of correct nomenclature should be part of quality assurance accreditation and we recommend that the approved (internationally accepted) name should appear on plant labels regardless of the trademarked or promotional name used. Registration of a cultivar does not give the applicant any intellectual property rights (unlike PBR), but it does prevent another individual obtaining exclusive rights through PBR (cultivar piracy is not unknown in Australia).

### **WHY DO PLANT NAMES SOMETIMES CHANGE?**

Everyone complains when plant names are changed and it always causes some confusion, so why does it happen? Names are changed for three reasons. Sometimes they change because a botanical taxonomist has reclassified the plant. This is usually based on more advanced knowledge about the relationships between plants and is often beneficial to breeders as more closely related plants are grouped together. However, it is common for re-classifications to be disputed among taxonomists and in the end it is only common usage that determines whether a new name has been accepted or not. With cultivated plants the cultivar name is fixed—

it can't be changed for botanical reasons—but the botanical part of the name (genus, species) can be changed. A second reason to change a name is when the original name was incorrect. This is usually because the original specimen was misidentified, a common occurrence with new cultivated plants. Finally a name can be changed if it is not in accordance with the rules of nomenclature or if a mistake was made in spelling the name.

### HOW DO YOU APPLY FOR REGISTRATION OF A CULTIVAR NAME?

The actual registration procedure is quite straightforward. We need a fresh specimen (to check the description, to colour code, and finally to use as a herbarium specimen), a colour photograph (preferably a slide), some information about origins, cultivation experience, and distinguishing features, etc. The application form (available on request) covers this. The fee for this is \$50AUD, unless the application is by a SGAP (Society for Growing Australian Plants) study group. Fees are waived for SGAP study groups on condition that they write the description. The fee is to cover administrative costs and herbarium materials. We only accept applications for plants that will be sold to the public. Our committee assesses applications.

### HOW DO YOU CONSTRUCT A CULTIVAR NAME?

The following is a simplified guide to naming new cultivars. Full details can be obtained from the *International Code for Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants*, 1995. The name takes the form of the genus in Latin and italics (e.g., *Grevillea*), plus the 'cultivar epithet' in a modern language and single quotation marks (e.g., 'Robyn Gordon').

Some rules:

- "Cultivar Epithets" must have no more than 10 syllables or 30 letters.
- All the words in a "Cultivar Epithet" (except words, other than the first word, like 'the', 'a', 'at', 'or', 'by', etc.) start with a capital letter.
- Single quotes are used around the cultivar name.
- The abbreviations "cv." or "var." are no longer valid.
- Hybrids should not be designated with "x" before the cultivar name.
- The name must be more than common descriptive words.
- Common names of plants cannot be used.
- Nothing can be used that is likely to cause confusion (e.g., similarity to existing cultivar names within the denomination class, place names if more than one form of the plant exists there) or which exaggerate the merits of the cultivar.
- Copyright or trade-marked words cannot be used (so business names are usually excluded).
- Trade designations are not recognised as cultivar names.
- Words like "cross", "hybrid", "strain", "selection", etc. can't be used.
- The cultivar epithet can only be used once within a denomination class (the genus).
- If the taxon of the denomination class is re-assigned (i.e., the *genus* part of the name changes) the "Cultivar Epithet" stays the same (unless the name has already been used for that denomination class). Eg. *Helichrysum* 'Princess of Wales' becomes *Bracteantha* 'Princess of Wales'.

- Grafted plants assume the name of the scion.
- Authors names are not usually cited.

NB these rules apply to cultivars introduced after 1995. Older cultivar names may not conform to them.

## RESOURCES

A number of plant name resources are now available on the World Wide Web. These include:

- <<http://www.anbg.gov.au/acra/acra-list-2000.html>> *ACRA*—a listing of all Australian registered cultivars, most with descriptions and photographs, and links to other International Registration Authorities. This site will soon have a list of most of the names used for Australian native cultivars (registered or not).
- <[http://www.affa.gov.au/docs/operating\\_environment/plant\\_breeder\\_rights/](http://www.affa.gov.au/docs/operating_environment/plant_breeder_rights/)> Plant Breeders Rights: This site has a list of all PBR protected varieties.
- <<http://www.anbg.gov.au/cgi-bin/apni>> *Australian Plant Name Index*—a database listing the name and publication reference for every higher plant taxon in Australia, native or naturalised.
- <<http://www.anbg.gov.au/win/index.html>> *What's its name?* - A concise database of plant names and name changes for Australia.

## LITERATURE CITED

- International Commission for the Nomenclature of Cultivated Plants.** 1995. International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants - 1995, Quarterjack Publishing, U.K.
- Stearn, W.T.** 1986. Historical survey of the naming of cultivated plants. *Acta Hort.* 182:19-28.