Identifying your plant

As far back as 1735 the Swedish botanist Linnaeus (Carl Von Linné) recognized the importance of naming organisms so they could be accurately identified throughout the world. He developed a two-word system identifying plants by genus (a biological class of plants with common characteristics) and species that could be based on the Latin language. Why Latin? Because it is a dead language and therefore meanings do not change with usage over time. This system is usually written in italics. For example: *Narcissus bulbocodium*.

Most plants have common names as well as scientific names. For example, *Narcissus* is the scientific name for the pretty yellow flowers that bloom in early spring that are commonly known as daffodils or jonquils. Paperwhites also share common characteristics with these flowers and so they too are named *Narcissus*.

By adding a second word, we identify the daffodil (*Narcissus*) from the jonquil (*Narcissus jonquilla*) and from the paperwhite (*Narcissus papyraceus)*. The first word is always capitalized while the second is not. The second word indicates the species; this is helpful to identify which plants are capable of interbreeding in order to develop new varieties (cultivars).

Without Linnaeus' system of identification of organisms, it would be difficult to determine which dracaena you have (or loved in the lobby). Dracaenas are a good example because there are so many of them. *Dracaena fragrans* is commonly known as a corn plant. The dragon tree is a *Dracaena marginata* and the beautiful 'Song of India,' also known as pleomele, is a *Dracaena reflexa.*

Names matter in everyday gardening. Using appropriate names for plants provides greater accuracy for identification, which helps to predict growth patterns as well as to diagnose problems and find solutions. They help us select the exact plant we are looking for, and they give us an understanding of how plants are related for the purpose of propagation and maintenance. Using the scientific name is also important for pest management and the diagnosis of plant diseases.

More information can be found at: **http://plants.usda.gov/java**
http://www.extension.umn.edu,
http://www.clemson.edu/extension,
http://lee.ifas.ufl.edu/Hort/GardenPubsAZ/Dracaena_Reflexa_Fact_Sheet. pdf

Checklist for January

Flower and Vegetable Garden

- ✓ Plan to use disease-resistant seeds and plants for better results. Consider something unique this season.

- ✓ Select native plants when planning a new garden or renovating an existing one. See Rutgers Fact Sheet FS1140 **"Incorporating Native Plants in Your Residential Landscape."** https://njaes.rutgers.edu/pubs/fs1140/

Indoor Plants

- ✓ Inspect houseplants for insect pests and remove by hand. Spray with insecticidal soap, if needed.

- ✓ Close the curtains or blinds between the window and houseplants on cold nights.

Trees and Shrubs

- ✓ Avoid the use of salt to melt snow; it is toxic to most plants. Use sand or an environmentally-safe alternative. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gg22ZIOIY5ErFQeIdiNE7rfuSJ9N4SvC/view

- ✓ Brush snow from evergreens after a storm by sweeping upward.

Lawn

- ✓ Avoid walking on your frozen lawn. This can cause bare spots and crush the frozen plant tissue.