

Grower's Corner

What to Call it?

By David Curtright

Editor's Note: This column is an updated version of one that appeared in the IWGS *Water Garden Journal* in 2007.

Almost anybody who grows flowering plants as a hobby or business has wondered about seeds and their potential to produce new varieties. How best to produce them, how to get desired results, what to do with them once you have them, and, of course, whether what you produce is worthy of a name or is just another plant, are all considerations that must go into successful production of seedlings and be a part of the calculus of whether we can do it at all. It took me a while to figure out the best procedures for me to follow, given my facilities and the various plants that I work with, but now that I have established a set of repeatable procedures, I can generate seeds with some confidence that if I behave myself and do not let the seedlings suffer too much trauma, and if I keep the labels straight, then I will come out of it with marketable plants.

Of course, once we start to generate new varieties, labeling can become a complicated issue. In the case of my waterlily seedlings, for instance, I label the tag with the name(s) of the parent(s), the date on which the seeds were collected, and from which pond. This works just fine until the second generation. It is one thing to say on a tag, SP (seed parent) 'Anne Emmett', Williams pond (one of my clients), 9-06, followed by a number that designates the order of its removal from the mass of seedlings that might result from a pod-full of seeds. This works fine until the next generation, when the tag has to say that the plant is a seedling from the plant that was the offspring of the Anne Emmett specimen that was in the Williams' pond in the summer of 2006. Codes are nice if you can establish one that isn't so full of numbers and abbreviations that it is indecipherable without a key. The whole thing gets complicated, and demands a simpler solution, which brings us to names.



Waterlily 'Anne Emmett' by Kit Knotts. Source: IWGS Plant Database.

Naming plants is a nice exercise in imagination, remembrance, and descriptive inventiveness. Of course, any man doing hybridization can always draw on the names of the women in his life, beginning with wife and mother (not necessarily in that order), then moving to children, grandchildren, siblings, and finally friends. Then he might move on to famous people, favorite places, or other favorite things. I have one that was generated at the Mission at San Juan Capistrano that I will almost certainly name for Fr. Junipero Serra, the mission's founder. I have promised clients of mine over the years that if I get something interesting out of the seeds that I collect in their ponds, that I will name it after their wives or themselves. It has happened once so far. I currently have a desire to produce a completely maroon leaf but for a green spot in the middle of the leaf, or a viviparous plant, and call it "Marooned". The possibilities are endless, and inventing names can be fun.

However, whether a plant should be introduced to the hobby is another matter altogether. Naming plants for our own purposes is a fine thing to do, but not everything can have, or deserves to have, a name. Every hybridizer wants to put himself on the map, and when a person generates a new variety, they want to introduce it to the hobby, sometimes without regard for what is already out there. Filling the hobby with more commonplace blue, purple, or red lilies confuses the issue of which lilies are which for those who must keep track of them, among them being those of us in the business of disseminating these plants. Hobbyists owe it to their hobbies to not fill them up with virtually identical varieties of different names.

For the sake of regularity and practicality, there are international standards that apply to the naming of all plants called The International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants, and the IWGS strictly adheres to them. Our registrars work diligently to ensure the qualities of each newly registered plant, as difficult as that can be. Information including photographs, written descriptions, and, less often, in-person viewing, is used to make the registrations official, and the better the information is, the less problematic the registrations are. It is not the duty of the registrar to judge the plant for uniqueness or beauty, but to merely register it with the most accurate data available, and ensure that the name has not been used before. To that end, some self-imposed discipline among those who produce new plants is necessary for us to keep accurate records and to not be overwhelmed by the volume of work involved.

We can all enjoy our hobbies and businesses regardless of what the plants are called or look like, but for the sake of the sanity of us all, limiting how many new cultivars we enter for consideration to those that are truly different in some significant way can only help.

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