

# Hone your knowledge on common and botanical plant names



**Carla Keast**

## AROUND THE YARD

Plant names might seem a lot like elm tree seeds — altogether too many, some taking root, lots blowing about, and all of them making a nuisance of themselves.

The common name is the one we can easily learn and remember, often describes the plant in some way, or is so odd that it's memorable. Unfortunately, common names can be a significant source of confusion.

There are plants with several common names, which is confusing. But worse, the same common name has also been used for completely different plants.

Bluebells is a spring bulb in England, a small summer flowering perennial in Scotland, a medium sized summer flowering perennial in North America, and a flowering vine in Australia. All of them have charming blue bell-shaped flowers, so why wouldn't they be called bluebells?

In Winnipeg, I've heard of two very



*Submitted photo*

**When picking out a plant, stick to botanical names to avoid confusion.**

different plants referred to as snow-in-summer. One's a woolly silver-leafed spring flowering perennial that prefers full sun and dry soil. It's a ground cover. The other is also a ground cover, although that's an understatement. This plant establishes itself with a tenacity that is going to leave you with no choice but to hand it the deed to your land. It

prefers full to partial sun and evenly moist soil. In reality, I've seen it thriving in all growing conditions. I've also seen it scoff at attempts to thin it out, blast through edging meant to contain it, sneer at an all out weeding, and turn a pull-out-all-stops battle with Round Up into a game of hide-and-seek. You really don't want to ask for the soft silver-leafed one

and receive the fierce aggressive one.

Botanical names are more complicated, but if you want to be certain of a plant, it's the only way to go.

The botanical names for those two snow-in-summer plants are *Cerastium tomentosum* and *Aegopodium podagraria*. Whether you can pronounce them or not, there's no way you'll confuse them.

Many of our local nurseries and garden centres group plants by their growing conditions, which is a simple way of helping the customer select an appropriate plant. Within the groupings, plants are often arranged by their botanical names. It's a way of avoiding confusion.

Botanical plant names might be a nuisance, but they're nothing to planting the fierce aggressive snow-in-summer when you think it's a soft silver-leafed snow-in-summer.

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