

Meanings and derivations of some native plants in the Pacific Northwest

Swedish botanist, Carolus Linnaeus published his first edition of *Systema Naturae* in 1735. He used the differences in the structure of flower parts and developed a system to classify plants. He developed a binomial (two-name) system. The first name, the genus, refers to the “type” such as a pine, (*pinus*). The second name, the specific epithet, refers to a particular species within that genus; so that *Pinus ponderosa* refers to a specific kind of pine tree, the Ponderosa Pine. Sometimes you will see letters or abbreviations that follow a species name. These refer to the first person or persons to describe and/or name it. For example, when you see an “L.” following a scientific name, it means that it was originally described and named by Linnaeus. His system still works surprising well in this age where relationships between living organisms can be determined by genetic sequencing.

Latin was used to name plants because at that time period it was the common language of the scientific community in Europe. Many names are merely “Latinized.” They are usually derived from a distinguishing characteristic, a person’s name, or the place or habitat where they are found. The pronunciation of the names may vary by how it would be said under Latin pronunciation rules, or by using the source’s original pronunciation. Pronunciation may also vary in different parts of the world.

Plants named after People			
Common Name	Scientific Name	Genus Meaning	Named After
Douglas Fir	<i>Pseudotsuga menziesii</i>	“False Hemlock”	Archibald Menzies (& David Douglas)
Pacific Madrone	<i>Arbutus menziesii</i>	Latin name for Strawberry Tree	Archibald Menzies
Oregon White Oak	<i>Quercus garryana</i>	Oak	Nicholas Garry
Mountain Hemlock	<i>Tsuga mertensiana</i>	Hemlock	Franz Karl Mertens
Pacific Dogwood	<i>Cornus nutallii</i>	Dogwood (horn or antler)	Thomas Nuttall
Pacific Mock Orange	<i>Philadelphus lewisii</i>	“brotherly love” after Pharoah Ptolemy II Philadelphus.	Meriwether Lewis
Salal	<i>Gaultheria shallon</i>	native name for the plant	Hugues Jean Gaultier
Piggy Plant	<i>Tolmiea menziesii</i>	William Fraser Tolmie	Archibald Menzies
Douglas Iris	<i>Iris douglasiana</i>	Gk. Goddess of the rainbow	David Douglas

Plants named after Places or habitat			
Common Name	Scientific Name	Genus Meaning	Species Meaning
Sitka Spruce	<i>Picea sitchensis</i>	Pitch Pine	Tlingit tribe/city in Alaska
Alaska Yellow Cedar	<i>Callitropsis nootkatensis</i>	Beautiful turning	Of Nootka Sound
Pacific Wax Myrtle	<i>Morella californica</i>	Little mulberry	Of California
Western Azalea	<i>Rhododendron occidentale</i>	Rose-red Tree	Of the west
Maidenhair Fern	<i>Adiantum aleuticum</i>	Unwetted (sheds water)	Of the Aleutian Islands
Coastal Strawberry	<i>Fragaria chiloensis</i>	The scent of the fruit	From Chile
Bunchberry	<i>Cornus canadensis</i>	Dogwood (horn or antler)	From Canada
Seathrift or Sea Pink	<i>Armeria maritima</i>	L. name for Dianthus	On the seacoast
Redwood Sorrel	<i>Oxalis oregana</i>	Gk. Name for sorrel, acid	Of Oregon
Tiger Lily	<i>Lilium columbianum</i>	Lily	Of the Columbia (River) Gray’s ship, Christopher Columbus

Plants named after characteristics			
Common Name	Scientific Name	Genus meaning	Species Meaning
Western Hemlock	<i>Tsuga heterophylla</i>	Hemlock (Japan)	Different leaves
Western Red Cedar	<i>Thuja plicata</i>	Juniper (Greek)	Plaited (leaves)
Grand Fir	<i>Abies grandis</i>	Fir	Large
Noble Fir	<i>Abies procera</i>	Fir	Tall
Ponderosa Pine	<i>Pinus ponderosa</i>	Pine	Big or heavy
Big Leaf Maple	<i>Acer macrophyllum</i>	Maple	Big leaf
Paper Birch	<i>Betula papyrifera</i>	Birch	Paper-bearing
Quaking Aspen	<i>Populus tremuloides</i>	Poplar	Trembling-like
Subalpine Fir	<i>Abies lasiocarpa</i>	Fir	Rough fruit
Shore Pine	<i>Pinus contorta</i>	Pine	Twisted (shoots/needles)
Vine Maple	<i>Acer circinatum</i>	Maple	Rounded (leaves)
Red-twig Dogwood Or Redosier Dogwood	<i>Cornus sericea</i>	Dogwood (horn or antler)	Silky (hairs under leaves); (Osier are willows used for baskets)
Serviceberry	<i>Amelanchier alnifolia</i>	French name for genus	Alder-leaved
Western Hazelnut	<i>Corylus cornuta</i>	Hazelnut or Filbert	Horn (appearance of husk)
American Cranberrybush	<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	Latin name for Wayfaring Tree V. <i>lantana</i>	Resembling <i>Acer opalus</i> (Maple-shaped leaves, <i>opalus</i> for opal)
Pacific Ninebark	<i>Physocarpus capitatus</i>	Bladder fruit	Having a head (flower cluster)
Pacific Rhododendron	<i>Rhododendron macrophyllum</i>	Rose-red Tree	Big leaf
Indian Plum	<i>Oemleria cerasiformis</i>	Augustus Gottlieb Oemler	cherry-shaped
Red-flowering Currant	<i>Ribes sanguineum</i>	Acid-tasting	Blood-red
Tall Oregon Grape	<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>	Bernard McMahon	Leaves that have curved hooks like an eagle's beak.
Oceanspray	<i>Holodiscus discolor</i>	Entire (unlobed) disc (under petals, sepals)	two-colored (leaves-top & bottom)
Red Elderberry	<i>Sambucus racemosa</i>	stringed instrument made from elder wood.	With racemes (elongated inflorescences)
Snowberry	<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>	Bear-together fruits	White
Western Sword Fern	<i>Polystichum munitum</i>	many rows (spore cases)	armed (with teeth on fronds)
Deer Fern	<i>Blechnum spicant</i>	Fern (Gk.)	Spiked (erect fertile fronds)
Lady Fern	<i>Athyrium felix-femina</i>	Doorless (late opening spores)	Happy lady
Evergreen Huckleberry	<i>Vaccinium ovatum</i>	L. name for European Blueberry	Oval (leaves)
Low Oregon Grape	<i>Mahonia nervosa</i>	Bernard McMahon	Veined (leaves)
Western Bleeding Heart	<i>Dicentra formosa</i>	Two-spurred	beautiful
Inside-out Flower	<i>Vancouveria hexandra</i>	George Vancouver	Six stamens
Kinnikinnick or Bearberry <i>Kinnikinnick</i> , is a native term for any plant used for smoking)	<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	Bear grapes	Bear's grape (berry on a vine)
Wild Ginger	<i>Asarum caudatum</i>	Wild Ginger (Gk.)	With tail (sepals)
False-lily-of-the-valley	<i>Maianthemum dilatatum</i>	May flower	Expanded/enlarged
Goatsbeard	<i>Aruncus dioicus</i>	Gk. name	Dioecious (separate genders-two houses)
Tufted Hairgrass	<i>Deschampsia caespitosa</i>	Louis Auguste Deschamps	Tufted
Beargrass	<i>Xerophyllum tenax</i>	Dry leaf	tenacious
Western Columbine	<i>Aquilegia formosa</i>	Water-collecting	beautiful
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Achilles (who used it medicinally)	Thousand-leaved
Fringecup	<i>Tellima grandiflora</i>	Anagram of Mitella	Large flowers
Nodding Onion	<i>Allium cernuum</i>	Garlic	Nodding
Common Camas	<i>Camassia quamash</i>	Sweet	Bulb
Western Trillium	<i>Trillium ovatum</i>	Three	Oval (leaves)