

# NORTHWOODS YARD & GARDEN

Weekly Column

January 15, 2024


## Clarifying Gardening Language

Winter is a fun time to read, research, and plan for the growing season. While doing so, sometimes there is confusion or debate regarding terminology when talking about plants.

Start with something basic, the name of the plant. Genus, species, common name, cultivar, and variety all are used to identify plants.

When coming across a new plant of interest, pictures and descriptions are great, but knowing botanical (or scientific) names is essential, especially with ornamental plants. Scientific or botanical names are the universal language of plants and include both genus (capitalized) and specific epithet, or species (lower case). Common names may be regional, and the same common name may apply to more than one kind of plant.

Varieties and cultivars are significant when choosing plant material. As mentioned last week, varieties are naturally occurring variations of a species; whereas cultivars are human-caused variations developed through crop breeding. Variations in a species both terms refer to include flower color, plant size, form, hardiness, and disease resistance. These are major deciding factors when choosing plants for landscapes or gardens.



Gardeners often debate on what plants to designate as weeds. Certainly, crabgrass or ground ivy in gardens or lawns stirs up little debate when called weeds. But what about something like goldenrod, is it a weed or a desirable native plant? Can a white pine tree be a weed? To keep things simple, use the definition of a weed as simply a plant out of place. It works every time.

What is a pesticide and what are herbicides? Pesticides kill insects. Herbicides kill weeds. But herbicides are pesticides, so pesticides also kill weeds. Confusing? The actual definition of a pesticide is a chemical used to control or inhibit a pest and can be organic or synthetic. Insecticides are pesticides to control insect pests; herbicides are pesticides to control undesirable plants, or weeds (defined above).

One last something to consider, what is the difference between a fruit and a vegetable? Think of fruit and images of apples, oranges, or watermelon come to mind. Think of vegetables and we see images of a garden full of beans, peas, carrots, corn, peppers, and tomatoes. Be careful, as all of these except carrots are fruit. If it is full of seeds, it is a fruit, even when in vegetable gardens. Fruit structures develop from flowers and protect seeds found inside.



Interested in learning more about Horticulture in Iron County?  
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