

KPOV – *The Point*
Gardening: Get Good at It
“Save That Tag!”
August 21, 2018

A few years back, we presented a plant identification program, “*To Know You Is To Love You – and To Grow You!*”, which reviewed the reasons it’s important to identify the plants in your garden. Fortunately, when nurseries worldwide tuck an ID tag in a plant pot or wrap one around a branch, they give us a treasure trove of information about our new purchase. Be mindful of the resource you’ve been given *and don’t lose that tag!*

Anyone who has tended an established garden knows how challenging it can be to identify everything growing within it. However, what’s both challenging *and endlessly frustrating* is trying to identify something *you planted yourself* and now – inevitably - can’t recall its name. That’s why saving the tags that come with your plants is critical. Consider keeping them secured with your most important documents like your will, trust and list of family heirlooms or, at minimum, in your garden journal.

An old Chinese proverb advises, “The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names.” The most important information on plant tags is the plant’s unique, two-part botanical name, a name primarily formed from Latin or Greek roots. The first part is the genus name; the second, the species. This is the name that’s a safe bet identifier because it’s used in every book, by every author on every continent and in every language.

Plant ID tags also provide one or more “common names” but plants often have several of those. So, for example, *Galium odoratum*, known to me as Sweet Woodruff, is known to others as Sweetscented Bedstraw, Mugwet and Kiss-Me-Quick -- names I’ve never heard before but my grandmother in Ohio or far-flung cousin in England might have. Knowing your plant’s botanical name, then, is a safer bet when it comes to learning about the gem you’ve planted.

Nursery tags also provide essential information about what a plant needs to thrive. Experienced gardeners know the best advice they can give to novices is *plant the right plant in the right place*. Quality tags are an invaluable quick-read resource describing how to select or create that “right place.” Most tell us the USDA hardiness zones for the plant, in other words, whether or not it will survive in our regional climate. They indicate its light preference: sun, shade, partial

sun, partial shade. And how tall and wide it will get so we can determine its best placement in a bed, ensuring it won't ultimately tower over or encroach on its neighbors. Many also give us care tips such as how much water the plant needs, the type of soil and planting depth it prefers, how to prune or deadhead it, whether or not to protect it with compost or mulch and whether its deer resistant. Often the tags provide a photograph of a healthy, mature version of the plant, some information on the plant's features and bloom time and even suggestions on plants to pair it with.

Whatever isn't included on the tag, you can research because you have in hand your plant's botanical name. You can thus dig in and determine what diseases and pests your plant is susceptible to and how to best avoid or treat them. You can find out how to prune, propagate and fertilize it.

Having all of this valuable information at your fingertips is an indisputable asset. So, whether you use a garden journal or family lock box, don't lose that tag!

For more information on this or any other gardening topic, call the Master Gardeners at 541-548-6088 or go to our website www.gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV, The Point.

References

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