



How do you pronounce "Clematis"?

BY ARNOLD MERCER '07

How about "Clivia"? Pronounce them any way you wish or follow a set of rules? Maybe either way or both? Let's take a look at some approaches to botanical name pronunciation.

According to J.L. Hudson, Seedsman <http://www.jlhudsonseeds.net/Pronunciation.htm>, many people are confused about the *correct* way to pronounce botanical names. Often people are insecure about this and worry they will *look stupid* if they get the name *wrong*.

Relax, the good news is there is no *correct* way to pronounce them. You may pronounce them any way you wish, and you will be just as *correct* as any Ph.D. botanist. Have confidence, and just say them the way it feels right to you. Anyone correcting you is only showing his or her own ignorance. The correct response is to smile and say "Yes, that's what I said," (and repeat the name as you pronounced it before).

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In an essay by Michael L. Charters, www.calflora.net/botanical-names/pronunciation.html, he makes the point that botanical Latin is a written language and one should not be very concerned about how the names are pronounced: William Stearn in his Botanical Latin says "Botanical

Latin is essentially a written language, but the scientific names of plants often occur in speech. How they are pronounced really matters little provided they sound pleasant and are understood by all." And A.W. Smith in *A Gardener's Handbook of Plant Names* echoes this sentiment by saying, "Within reason-

able limits, nobody need be too disturbed about pronunciation."

In spite of this "pronounce it however you like" approach, there are organizations and publications that promote standards for pronunciation. At the back of every issue of *The American*

Gardener magazine, there is a pronunciation guide for every plant mentioned in that issue. *Fine Gardening Magazine* has an online guide and audio clips for the pronunciation of every plant name on its list.

<http://www.finegardening.com/pronunciation-guide> .

For those seeking a set of rules for pronunciation, the Master Gardeners of Adams County, Pennsylvania, has published a guide titled *Latin for Gardeners: a Brief Pronunciation Guide*.

http://www.emmitsburg.net/gardens/articles/adams/2002/latin_for_gardeners.htm . This is a set of guide lines based on the AHS pronunciation patterns. In addition to giving rules for pronunciation, it gives examples of how different names should be pronounced and links to some plant nomenclature websites.

So how do you pronounce Clematis? According to *Fine Gardening*, you pronounce it KLEM-a-tis, but from my research for this article, it could depend on how your mother pronounced it, what part of the USA you live in or what English-speaking country you live in. A few examples include KLEE-mah-tis, cle-MAT-us, CLEM-uh-tus and cle-MATE-is.

How about Clivia? *Fine Gardening* favors KLY-vee-ah, and that is how many pronounce it since it was named after Lady Charlotte Clive. However others disagree. In fact there are as many as 23 ways to pronounce Clivia.

On a cold winter night, curl up with your tablet, laptop, or PC and check out the websites listed above, you may find them interesting and enlightening.