

3. Plant names – which name do you use?

There are three types of name used for most plant species in New Zealand: the Māori name, the common name and the latinised botanical name. Although, you may think it easier to use Māori or common names for plants there are several advantages of using the full latinised botanical name.

What are the advantages of using botanical names?

1. THEY AVOID CONFUSION

Common names can cause confusion as one name may apply to several species not necessarily related. For example, in New Zealand tea tree applies to *Leptospermum scoparium* agg. and *Kunzea ericoides* agg. and the exotic plant *Camellia sinensis*. Pōhuehue is a Māori name used for a range of *Muehlenbeckia* species including *Muehlenbeckia complexa*, *Muehlenbeckia ephedroides*, *Muehlenbeckia axillaris* and *Muehlenbeckia australis*. Mingimingi is used for many small-leaved shrubs, such as *Coprosma propinqua*, *Leptecophylla juniperina*, and *Leucopogon fasciculatus*.

2. THEY HELP TO SHOW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PLANTS

Botanical names may sound complicated but they help show how different species are related to each other. For example, the common names 'potato', 'black nightshade' and 'poroporo' do not indicate any relationship between these three species, but the botanical names (*Solanum tuberosum*, *Solanum nigrum* and *Solanum aviculare* and *Solanum laciniatum*) show that they are all related to each other and in the same genus.

3. THEY FACILITATE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION (UNIVERSALITY)

The binomial (two name) system is an international system for naming species. Botanists have adopted, by international agreement, a single language to be used on a world wide basis. A botanical name in India refers to the same plant as a botanical name in Iceland.

Some Māori names for plants have been adopted as part of the scientific names of plants. For example, *Corokia* for korokio, *Austroderia toetoe* for toetoe, *Manoao colensoi* for manoao or silver pine, *Phyllocladus toatoa* for toatoa, *Podocarpus tōtara* for tōtara and *Raukaua anomalus* for raukawa.



From left: Korokia (*Corokia cotoneaster*), tōtara (*Podocarpus tōtara*), raukawa (*Raukaua anomalus*).



Leptospermum scoparium (top) and *Muehlenbeckia australis*.



The genus *Solanum* includes the indigenous poroporo (*S. aviculare*) and introduced potato (*S. tuberosum*).





Parsonsia capsularis var. *rosea*.

4. THEY CAN HELP DESCRIBE THE PLANT

Some botanical names describe a significant feature of the species. For example, a native jasmine is named *Parsonsia capsularis* var. *rosea*, because the seeds of this species are borne in long capsules (*capsularis*) and the flowers are pink (*rosea*). The genus name *Coprosma* translates to dung because many species in the genus have an unpleasent smell. One species of coprosma smells so strongly that it is named *Coprosma foetidissima* (very fetid). Another coprosma has large leaves and is named *C. grandifolia* (big leaf). Please note that some apparently descriptive names can be misleading. For example, the leaves of *Helichrysum lanceolatum* (lance-shaped), are mostly rounded.

5. THEY HONOUR A PERSON

Some plants are named in honour of a particular person. For example, the orchid *Corybas cheesemanii* is named in honour of Thomas Cheeseman, an early New Zealand botanist.



Corybas cheesemanii.

How to write botanical names

1. GENUS AND SPECIES NAMES

The convention for writing the genus and species name is as follows:

Capital letter lowercase letter (even if named after a place or person)

Agathis australis kauri — common name lowercase

Both names are underlined (when handwritten or typed) or set in italics in print.

Agathis australis kauri



Agathis australis, kauri.