

## Choosing Plant Labels

by Rita Pelczar

**G**OOD PLANT LABELS are indispensable, particularly for gardeners with large or diverse plant collections. Anyone whose garden contains multiple azalea, hosta or daylily cultivars will want to label each, particularly if he or she shares plants with others. Have you ever tried to identify daylilies when they are not in bloom?

Similarly, vegetable growers who raise many heirloom varieties must know their plants' identities for seed saving and to determine the best performers. Labels are also essential for plant breeders and collectors who need to meticulously monitor their botanical treasures.

And of course plant labels can help prevent overzealous gardeners from accidentally digging up plants that are late emerging in spring, like scarlet mallow (*Hibiscus coccineus*), or are dormant at odd times, like surprise lilies (*Lycoris* spp.).

A variety of plant labels, in a range of designs and styles, are now available for home gardeners. The style you select should depend both on your goals and personal taste. Labels for use in a propagating bed or cold frame usually serve a strictly functional purpose, whereas those out in the garden proper may be showy or discreet, depending on the individual gardener's desires.

If the label is meant for your eyes only, a durable but discreet marker—easy for you to locate, but inconspicuous to garden visitors—is the ticket. On the other hand, if your intent is to identify the plants for your visitors, you will want to spend a bit more and select a label that is attractive in its own right, and perhaps most importantly, one that does not detract from the garden's appearance.

### HANG IN THERE

Metal tags that can be attached to a woody stem with a wire should last for several seasons. They have the advantage of staying put—they won't get uprooted by dogs, stepped on, or buried by mulch. Orion Industries offers several styles of hang tags,



Ornamental hanging tag from Orion

including copper or aluminum rectangles for embossing with a ballpoint pen, or an anodized aluminum tags for use with a weather-resistant marking pencil or pen.

Also intended for attaching directly to the plant are Orion's oval Ornamental Hang Tags in stainless steel or copper. These are a bit more showy and pricey than the rectangular style.

BotanicaLabels from Wren are heavy-duty stainless steel tags with a large space for writing with the paint pen that is included with the package of 10 labels. This style is particularly useful if you like to include information above and beyond the name of the plant (date of planting, cultural information, source, etc.).

All labels that you wrap around a plant stem or branch should be periodically checked to make sure they are not girdling the plant.

### WELL GROUNDED

Many gardeners prefer their labels in the

ground rather than on the plant. Labels of this nature preclude the girdling issue; however, they can get lost or displaced, and if you move the plant, be sure to transplant the label, too.

Wren and Orion offer sturdy and attractive steel T-shaped labels that are six-



Terra cotta marker from Orion

and-a-half and five-and-three-quarters inches tall respectively. Both have plenty of room for writing. A smaller copper version from Orion is suggested for use in containers. For a more formal garden, Orion has terra cotta labels in two styles.

Wren's 24-inch scrolled stainless steel



Metal markers and hang tags from Wren Garden Products



Vertical marker from Paw Paw



Horizontal marker from Paw Paw



Professionally printed labels for metal plant markers from Garden Fonts

garden stakes are quietly elegant with their simple design and generous, but not overwhelming, three-and-a-half-inch tag. The manufacturer recommends using them for tall perennials, annuals, bulbs, shrubs and water gardens. Wren offers a pen with oil-based paint that will stand up to the weather. A similar style with an 18-inch stainless steel stake and a steel or copper tags are available from Orion.

Plantid's Plant Identification Markers are dark green, nine-inch, polypropylene mountings that surround a vinyl insert. Both mounting and insert are weather resistant. Three collections of preprinted labels—herbs, vegetables, and perennials—as well as blank inserts for making your own labels are available. Whether you purchase pre-printed labels or you write your own, accuracy is critical. Be forewarned: Even commercially printed labels can come with misspelled botanical names.

Bosmere, Orion, Paw Paw Everlast, and EON label companies produce copper and/or zinc labels with steel stakes in a wide variety of sizes and styles. Practi-

cal and attractive in a no-nonsense sort of way, these labels remain inconspicuous when judiciously placed. The vertically oriented Everlast and the horizontal EON labels have rounded edges, while Orion and Paw Paw's horizontal zinc labels are sharp-edged and tend to bend a little more easily under duress. The disadvantage of vertical labels, of course, is that they are more difficult to read than the horizontal style.

For an easy-to-read professional look, you might consider sending your plant list to Garden Fonts. The company will print your labels on UV-resistant polyester to peel and stick onto metal markers. Or, if you are a do-it-yourselfer, you may be interested in Orion's Computer-Imprintable Labels. Using Orion's software, you can print your own labels, which then be covered with protective plastic and insert them into durable metal stakes.

### COMPARING PRODUCTS

The cost, functionality, and durability of plant labels are relatively easy to compare. If you want a "behind-the-scenes" sort of labeling system—handy when you need it, but not really part of the garden picture—consider the factors I outlined above. The aesthetic value of a label is another story. For labels that will be part of the garden picture, you will have to determine which product suits your own taste and garden style. ∞



Preprinted marker from Plantid

*Rita Pelczar is a contributing editor to The American Gardener.*

## Sources

For more information about any of the products described, contact the manufacturers below.

**EON Industries, Inc.**, Liberty Center, OH. (419) 533-4961. [www.eonindustries.com](http://www.eonindustries.com).

**Garden Fonts**, Castine, ME. (207) 326-9413. [www.gardenfonts.com](http://www.gardenfonts.com).

**Orion Industries**, Cloverdale, CA. (707) 529-8707. [www.gardenmarker.com](http://www.gardenmarker.com).

**Paw Paw Everlast Label Co.**, Paw Paw, MI. [www.everlastlabel.com](http://www.everlastlabel.com).

**Plantid, Inc.**, New Prague, MN. (612) 758-6888. [www.plantid.com](http://www.plantid.com).

**Wren Garden Products, Inc.**, Rowayton, CT. (800) 821-6245. [www.bywren.com](http://www.bywren.com).