

MEMBERS' FORUM

HIBISCUS NOMENCLATURE

I'm puzzled and intrigued by your identification of the crimson-eyed white hibiscus on page 14 of the July/August 2009 issue. Identical flowers are covering our brackish North Carolina wetlands right now and, in my reference books (okay, some are old) for this area they are identified as *Hibiscus moscheutos*, not *H. lasiocarpus* as in your article.



Hibiscus lasiocarpus or *H. moscheutos*?

I did research online and found that some taxonomists have separated *H. moscheutos* into subspecies, with ssp. *lasiocarpus* as an extra epithet assigned to the woolly subspecies of this plant, the one most commonly found in California. I also found a 2001 article from *The American Gardener* that identifies as *H. moscheutos* what appears to me to be the same plant I'm looking at in my wetlands. These plants, now blooming, have lance-shaped leaves that are not woolly like those of *Kosteletzkya virginica*, which also grows in the wetlands but is still in bud.

Have the taxonomists been playing with these plant names? It's enough to make an amateur like me want to give up on the use of scientific names.

Ellen Herron
Havelock, North Carolina

Editor's response: Alas, botanical nomenclature is always in flux. The USDA PLANTS database (<http://plants.usda.gov>) now lists the plant in question as *Hibiscus*

Member Services

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lasiocarpus ("os" rather than "us" based on the original name given by Antonio Jose Cavanilles). And in this case, the two taxa have overlapping native ranges and interbreed readily, so identification is challenging. There are some good images of the flowers of both species on the website of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (www.wildflower.org).

PRONUNCIATION QUESTION

I always enjoy the pronunciations page in the back of each issue, and I'm curious about what set of guidelines is being used to establish syllables, long and short vowel sounds, accents, etc. It would be helpful to have access to the guidelines in order to work with names not on the list each month. Are the guidelines available?

Gary Emberger
Messiah College
Grantham, Pennsylvania

Editor's response: We use several reference books to compile the pronunciations listed in the magazine (two are listed below) and over time have developed a database of several thousand pronunciations for plant names. Eventually we hope to refine this database and make it accessible to AHS members through the website.

■ *Stearns Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners* by William T. Stearn. Cassell Publishers, London, 1972.

■ *The Pronouncing Dictionary of Plant Names*, American Nurseryman Publishing Company, Chicago, Illinois, 2006.

CLEBSCH AND SALVIAS

I'm pleased you featured Betsy Clebsch in the May/June issue. Her work with *Salvia* has brought this group of dazzling plants to the attention of gardeners around the world.

A gracious woman with a wonderful sense of humor, Betsy spent many hours in the botany library of my home institution—the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park—during the time she was working on the initial and second edition of her *Salvia* book. Some of the salvias she has given me are thriving in my garden and attract many Anna's hummingbirds.

Frank Almeda
California Academy of Sciences
San Francisco, California

LEPIDOPTERAN DECLINE?

Has anyone else noticed a decline in the butterfly and moth population? In my Maryland garden, I have seen an immense decline since 2005, which I have tracked through my annual photos of blooming Joe Pye weed and zinnias. Each summer



through 2005, the flowers were covered with yellow swallowtails and other butterflies and moths. Last year, I did not see one swallowtail. This year, I feel fortunate to have seen three yellow swallowtails in July (see photo above). My garden still attracts bumblebees but not much else.

Eleanor McKay
Annapolis, Maryland

PLEASE WRITE US! Address letters to Editor, *The American Gardener*, 7931 East Boulevard Drive, Alexandria, VA 22308. Send e-mails to editor@ahs.org (note Letter to Editor in subject line). Letters we print may be edited for length and clarity.