FLORIDA Wildflower FOUNDATION

Unit 9

Learning Wildflower Names

Overview

Every wildflower has a story behind its name. Common names often describe how a plant looks, where it grows, or how people have used it, while scientific names reveal evolutionary relationships and help scientists worldwide communicate precisely. In this unit, students will explore the fascinating origins of wildflower names, discover how the same plant can have different common names in different places, and learn why scientific naming matters.

This unit celebrates the diversity of wildflowers students have studied throughout the guide. By learning about naming conventions and etymology, students gain a deeper appreciation for how humans have observed, valued, and organized knowledge about the plant world.

Activities

1. What's In a Name?
2. Common Names Around the World
3. Wildflowers Named After People
4. Name Your Own Wildflower

Vocabulary

binomial nomenclature
botanist
Carl Linnaeus
common name
family
genus
scientific name
species
taxonomist

Vocabulary words are italicized within the introduction text and activities.

Standards

Grade 3: SC.3.N.1.1, SC.3.N.1.3, SC.3.N.1.5, SC.3.N.1.6, SC.3.N.3.2, SC.3.L.14.1, ELA.3.C.4.1, ELA.3.C.3.1, ELA.3.C.1.4

Grade 4: SC.4.N.1.1, SC.4.N.1.4, SC.4.N.1.6, SC.4.N.1.7, SC.4.N.3.1, SC.4.L.16.2, ELA.4.C.4.1, ELA.4.C.3.1

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Introduction

Every wildflower has a ***common name*** (like "tickseed") and a ***scientific name*** in Latin (like *Coreopsis leavenworthii*). Scientists who name and organize plants are called ***botanists*** or ***taxonomists***. They place plants into groups, or families, based on shared features such as flowers, fruits or seeds. A ***family*** is a broad group of related plants that share general characteristics. For example, the Aster family includes plants with similar flower structures, like *Coreopsis*, sunflowers (*Helianthus*), and thistles (*Cirsium*).

Latin Wildflower Names

Each plant has its own ***scientific name*** in Latin, which is the same all over the world, no matter what language people speak. This two-part naming system is called ***binomial nomenclature***, and it was created by a Swedish scientist named ***Carl Linnaeus*** in the 1700s. Latin names often describe a plant's appearance, origin or honor the person who discovered it.

Scientific names have two parts: ***genus*** (like a plant's "first name") and ***species*** (its "last name"). Plants in the same genus share certain traits, but each species has its own unique details. For example, wildflowers in the *Coreopsis* genus all have bright, daisy-like flowers, but their leaf shapes or flower forms may differ.

Florida has 12 different native species of *Coreopsis*. They all share the genus name, but each has its own species name. One species, *Coreopsis leavenworthii*, is named after Dr. Melines Leavenworth, who lived in Florida in the 1800s.

Coreopsis belongs to the Aster family, which contains over 400 species in Florida alone. Here's how its scientific name breaks down:

- Family: Aster
- Genus: *Coreopsis*
- Species: *leavenworthii*

The genus name *Coreopsis* comes from the Greek word *koris* (meaning "bug") and *opsis* (meaning "appearance"), because the seeds look like tiny ticks or bugs.

Common Wildflower Names

In addition to scientific names, plants are also given ***common names***. These are the names people use every day, and they often describe the plant's look, where it grows, or how it has been used. For example:

- Swamp sunflower grows in wet habitats.
- Firebush is named for its bright reddish-orange flowers.
- Rattlesnakemaster got its name from its historical use as a medicine for snake bites.

Because common names vary, one plant may have several different common names depending on the region or tradition. That's why scientists rely on Latin names — they are always the same!

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Unit 9 Activity 1

What's In a Name?

Objective

Students will be able to make inferences about wildflower names based on their appearance, structure or other characteristics.

Materials

- "What's in a name" worksheet (one per student)

Standards

Grade 3: SC.3.N.1.1, SC.3.N.1.3, SC.3.N.1.6

Grade 4: SC.4.N.1.1, SC.4.N.1.6, SC.4.N.1.7

Directions

1. Begin by reviewing what students have learned about ***common names*** of wildflowers. Discuss examples and ask: "Why do you think people gave these names to plants?"
2. Give each student a "What's In a Name" worksheet. Have them look at each wildflower picture and its common name, then fill out the chart, explaining why they think that common name was chosen.
3. Once students have inferred why each common name was chosen, ask them to create their own common name for the wildflower, using a different characteristic if possible. Have students share their common names aloud or in small groups.
4. After students finish, share the true explanations for each common name.s

Discussion

- How did your guesses compare to the real explanations? Were any surprising?
- What factors influenced the names (appearance, texture, habitat, historical use, etc.)?
- Can you think of a new common name that uses a different characteristic? (For example, if the original name was based on texture, try using color or habitat instead.)

What's In a Name?

How do "common names" describe wildflowers? Look at the wildflowers and their common names shown below. Why is each wildflower so named? Fill in the chart with what you think the common names might mean. Then fill in what you would name the wildflower.

Wildflower	Explanation	What I would name it
String lily		
Cardinalflower		
Milkweed		
Lizard's tail		
Cat's tongue		
Pitcherplant		
Greeneyes		
Coralbean		

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Unit 9 Activity 2

Common Names Around the World

Objective

Students will be able to compare ***common names*** for the same wildflower across different regions and explain reasons for the variations.

Materials

- paper

Standards

Grade 3: SC.3.N.1.1, SC.3.N.1.2, SC.3.N.1.3, SC.3.N.1.6

Grade 4: SC.4.N.1.1, SC.4.N.1.2, SC.4.N.1.6, SC.4.N.1.7

Note: Internet access is needed for this activity. If Internet or computer access is limited, students may work together to research the questions in the library or using texts provided by the teacher.

Directions

1. Provide students with a short list of wildflowers that grow in Florida and elsewhere. Some examples include:
   - Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
   - Spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohiensis*)
   - Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
   - Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
   - Cardinalflower (*Lobelia cardinalis*)
   - Joe-Pye weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*)
   - Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
2. Have students choose one wildflower to research. Students should record:
   - common name(s) in Florida
   - common name(s) in other states or countries
   - possible reasons for differences (appearance, habitat, cultural use, historical naming, etc.)
3. Ask students to share their findings with the class or in small groups.

Discussion

- How do the common names differ between Florida and other regions?
- Why do you think people in different places gave the same plant different names?
- What does this tell you about how humans relate to plants in their local environment?

Extension

Students can create a “global common name” chart, showing how one wildflower is called something different in different regions, highlighting patterns or surprises.

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Unit 9 Activity 3

Wildflowers Named After People

Objective

Students will be able to research people that wildflowers are named after and share about their contributions to the world.

Directions

1. Explain to students that some Florida wildflowers are named for people — scientists, ***botanists*** or historical figures — rather than for their appearance or the habitat in which they live.
2. Give each student a "Namesake Profile" worksheet.
3. Have them choose a wildflower from the provided list, research the person it is named after, and fill in the worksheet with their findings. Students should include:
   - who the person was
   - their contributions to science or Florida history
   - a drawing of the person and the wildflower (optional for artistic engagement)
4. Encourage students to make connections between the person's contributions and the plant itself, and to think about why these people were honored with a wildflower name.

Materials

- computer/tablet or field guide
- "Namesake Profile" worksheet (one per student)
- crayons, colored pencils or markers

Standards

Grade 3: ELA.3.C.1.4, ELA.3.C.3.1, ELA.3.C.4.1, SC.3.N.1.3

Grade 4: ELA.4.C.3.1, ELA.4.C.4.1, SC.4.N.1.6

Note: Internet access is needed for this activity. If Internet or computer access is limited, students may work together to research the questions in the library or using texts provided by the teacher.

Extension

1. After completing their worksheets, have students display their work and complete a "gallery walk" to view and discuss their peers' findings.
2. Have students reflect on their classmates' research by thinking about or writing responses to the following questions:
   - Which person's story surprised you? Why?
   - How did the person's work influence science or Florida history?
   - What patterns do you notice among the people honored?
   - Why might plants be named after people?
   - Can you connect the person's work to the wildflower's characteristics?

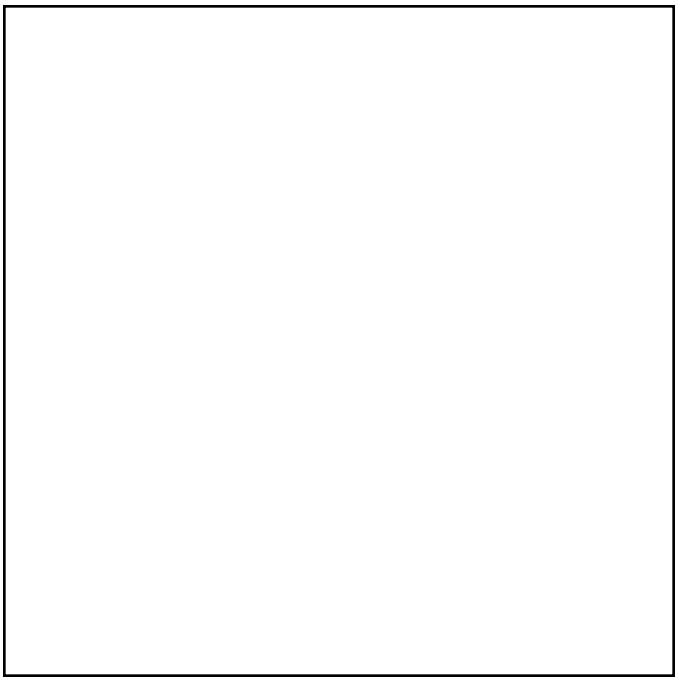
Namesake Profile

Name:

Where are they from?

When did they live?

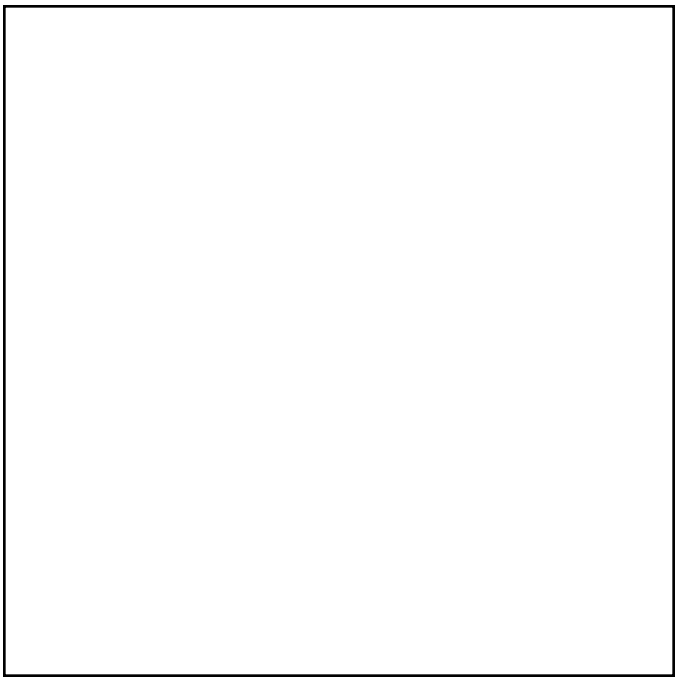
What did they do?



Wildflower common name:

Wildflower scientific name:

Where is it found?



If you could name a plant after someone today, who would it be and why?

Wildflower Namesakes

Below are a few wildflowers and their namesakes. The list is alphabetical for quick reference. Encourage students to use multiple sources, including field guides and online resources, to verify information.

Wildflower	Namesake
Mohr's coneflower (*Rudbeckia mohrii*)	Charles T. Mohr (1824-1901) was a German pharmacist who loved plants and spent 40 years writing *Plant Life of Alabama*.
Godfrey's false dragonhead (*Physostegia godfreyi*)	Robert K. Godfrey (1911-2000) was curator of the Florida State University herbarium. His specialty was aquatic plants.
Rugel's false pawpaw (*Asimina rugelii*)	Ferdinand Rugel (1806-1879) was a German pharmacist and botanist who traveled in the southern United Stated discovering new plants.
Ashe's calamint (*Calamintha ashei*)	William Willard Ashe (1872-1932) worked for the U.S. Forest Service and named more than 500 plant species.
Bartram's ixia (*Calydorea caelestina*)	William Bartram (1739-1823) was an American explorer, botanist and ornithologist who chronicled his exploration of the Southern Colonies in *Bartram's Travels*.
Small's milkpea (*Galactia smallii*)	John Kunkel Small (1869-1938) was an American botanist and naturalist who wrote *Flora of the Southeastern United States* in 1903.
Leavenworth's tickseed (*Coreopsis leavenworthii*)	Dr. Melines Conkling Leavenworth (1796-1862) was an American physician and botanist who collected plants in the southern US and Mexico.
Feay's palafox (*Palafoxia feayi*)	William T. Feay (1804-1879) was a physician and botanist from Savannah. He is credited with discovering Palafox and named it after Jose Rebolledo Palafox, Duke of Saragossa in Spain, who fought against Napolean in France.
Michaux's milkweed (*Aslcepias michauxii*)	Frenchman Andre Michaux (1746-1802) was the official botanist of King Louis XVI. He visited Florida in 1788.
Pineland jacquemontia (*Jacquemontia curtissii*)	Victor Jacquemont (1801-1832) was a French botanist and geologist. Allen Hiram Curtiss (1845-1907) was an American botanist who lived and worked largely in Florida.

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Unit 9 Activity 4

Name Your Own Wildflower

Objective

Students will be able to create and name a "new" wildflower and explain the reasoning behind the name.

Materials

- "Name Your Own Wildflower" worksheets (one per student)
- crayons, colored pencils or markers

Standards

Grade 3: SC.3.L.14.1, SC.3.N.1.3, SC.3.N.1.5 , SC.3.N.1.6, SC.3.N.3.2

Grade 4: SC.4.L.16.2, SC.4.N.1.4, SC.4.N.1.6, SC.4.N.1.7, SC.4.N.3.1

Directions

1. Review what students have learned about wildflower structures, functions, names, and habitats.
2. Give each student a "Name Your Own Wildflower" worksheet.
3. Have students design a new wildflower on the worksheet, showing:
    - a close-up of the flower, leaves and stem
    - the plant in its natural habitat
4. Remind students to consider how structures (color, shape, size, etc.) help the flower survive in the chosen habitat.
5. Using the prompts on the worksheet, students will name their wildflower and explain their reasoning.

Discussion

- Have students share their wildflower designs and explain how each part helps the plant survive in its habitat.
- Ask students to explain the names they chose and how the name connects to the plant's features or environment.
- In pairs or small groups, have students compare flowers designed for the same habitat. How are they alike? How are they different?
- Ask students to reflect: If your flower lived in a different habitat, what would need to change about its structures?

Name Your Own Wildflower

Draw your wildflower. Be sure to show the whole plant in its natural habitat and include a close-up of the flower, leaves and stem.

What is the name of your wildflower?

Why did you choose this name?

Where does your wildflower live (habitat)?

What special structures or features help your wildflower survive in its habitat?

How do pollinators or animals use your wildflower?

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Glossary

binomial nomenclature: the two-part scientific naming system created by Carl Linnaeus; every organism gets a genus name and a species name (like *Coreopsis leavenworthii*)

botanist: a person who studies plants and their life cycles

Carl Linnaeus: Swedish scientist (1707-1778) who created the modern system for naming and classifying living things using two-part Latin names

common name: the everyday name that people use to describe an organism, such as "tickseed"

family: the largest group that classifies plants based on shared characteristics

genus: a group of closely related species; the first word in a scientific name (plural: genera)

scientific name: the official Latin name given to every organism, written in italics with genus capitalized and species lowercase (like *Rudbeckia hirta*)

species: a group of organisms that can reproduce with each other; the second word in a scientific name

taxonomist: a scientist who specializes in naming and classifying plants

Tip

Turn the vocabulary words into a Jeopardy-style game for a fun, interactive way to review with your students. Free online templates are available at JeopardyLabs.com, or you can download templates for PowerPoint or Google Slides.

Wildflower Names Definition Match

Match the vocabulary words in the Word Bank to their definitions.

Word Bank

binomial nomenclature	common name	scientific name
botanist	family	species
Carl Linnaeus	genus	taxonomist

_____ the everyday name that people use to describe an organism, such as "tickseed"

_____ a group of organisms that can reproduce with each other; the second word in a scientific name

_____ a person who studies plants and their life cycles

_____ a group of closely related species; the first word in a scientific name

_____ the two-part scientific naming system created by Carl Linnaeus; every organism gets a genus name and a species name (like Coreopsis leavenworthii)

_____ the official Latin name given to every organism, written in italics with genus capitalized and species lowercase

_____ Swedish scientist (1707-1778) who created the modern system for naming and classifying living things using two-part Latin names

_____ a scientist who specializes in naming and classifying plants

_____ the largest group that classifies plants based on shared characteristics

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binomial nomenclature	common name	scientific name
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taxonomist — a scientist who specializes in naming and classifying plants

family — the largest group that classifies plants based on shared characteristics

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Resources

Reference books

100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names by Diana Wells

Carl Linnaeus: Father of Classification by Margaret Jean Anderson

Complete Guide to Florida Wildflowers by Roger Hammer

Conversations on Botany by Sarah Mary Fitton

Flora's Dictionary by Elizabeth Wirt

Florida Wildflowers in Their Natural Communities by Walter Kingsley Taylor

The Flower Hunter: William Bartram, America's First Naturalist by Deborah Kogan Ray

John and William Bartram: Travelers in Early America by Sandra Wallus Sammons

National Audubon Society First Field Guide Series, Scholastic

Wildflowers and the Stories Behind Their Names by Phyllis S. Busch

Websites and other web resources

Florida Wildflower Foundation (plant profiles, photos and resources focused on Florida natives)
www.FlaWildflowers.org

Florida's Wildflowers and Butterflies (Florida Museum of Natural History)
www.FloridaMuseum.ufl.edu/wildflowers/wildflower-search

iNaturalist SEEK (image recognition app for identifying plants and animals)
www.iNaturalist.org/pages/seek_app

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (national database, searchable by family or habitat)
www.Wildflower.org/plants-main