With its tall stately stems and beautiful purple blooms, Verbena bonariensis is now found in gardens very far from its native Buenos Aires.

WHERE PLANTS COME FROM

One of the most useful group of species names is that which gives some indication of where a plant originally came from. Once a gardener has a clue or two about the geographical region to which a plant is native, he or she can begin to assess whether it might thrive or flounder when transplanted to their own plot. However, the level of detail that such names provide varies tremendously. It can be as broad as a continent (europaeus, European) or a country (hispanicus, Spanish), or may be more specific, such as a state (pennsylvanicus, from Pennsylvania) or even a town (albanensis, from the English town of St. Albans). In rare cases, the name might be so detailed as to refer to the house or estate where a plant was bred, such as the holly Ilex x altaclerensis, from Highclere Castle, England.
Thwarted love apart, the spikiness associated with the Acanthus actually refers to the plant’s flowers, which are formed from mauve and white overlapping bracts and tubular petals. These are born on tall spikes that rise up gracefully from a mat of large leaves. Among the most commonly grown is *Acanthus spinosus*, which has pointed, spiny leaves, produces an abundance of flowers and can easily reach a stately 1.2 m (4 feet). *Spinosus* (spinosa, spinosum) means spiny. *A. mollis* has softer leaves and it is probably from this species that the common American name for acanthus, Bear’s Breech, or Bear’s Breeches, originates as, just like a bear, the acanthus leaf is big, broad, and hairy! (Mollis, mollis, molle means soft or flexible)

Acanthus plants thrive in dry, sunny spots in the garden, but beware where you plant them, as they form a long taproot that makes it very difficult to remove them from unsuitable locations. They are generally hardy, but it is advisable to apply a generous mulch to cover the cut-down stems over the first couple of winters after planting.

The lush foliage and tall architectural flower spikes of the acanthus plant strikes a dramatic note in any garden. Belonging to the family Acanthaceae, the name for this genus of herbaceous perennials derives from *akanthos*, the Greek for thorn. Where you see that *acanth* forms part of the name of a plant, watch out, as it indicates that in some part it is spiny, spiky, or thorny. For instance, *acanthococcus* (acanthocoma, acanthocomum) tells us the plant has spiny hairs on its leaves, while *acanthifolius* (acanthifolia, acanthifolium) means the leaves resemble that of the acanthus plant. In Greek mythology, the nymph Acantha was much desired by the god Apollo. In an attempt to fight off his unwanted amorous advances, Acantha scratched Apollo’s face. Thus rejected, his revenge was to turn her into a spiky plant.
alpestris  al-PES-triss
alpestris, alpestre
From lower, usually wooded, mountain habitats.
alpicolus  al-PEE-kol-us
alpica, alpículum
From high mountain habitats.
alpigenus  al-PEE-gen-us
alpigena, alpigénum
From a mountainous region.
alpinus  AL-pin-us
alpina, alpínúm
From high alpine regions, often rocky.

Latin in Action
As its name suggests the rock rose Helianthemum apenninum originates from the Italian Apennine Mountains and thrives in dry and rocky places. With its evergreen silver foliage topped by masses of white flowers, this tough plant provides excellent ground cover and is extremely drought resistant.

aleppicus  a-LEP-ee-kus
aleppica, aleppicum
From Aleppo, Syria.
alhecticus  a-LEW-tih-kus
aleutica, aleuticum
From the Aleutian Islands, Alaska.
alexandrinus  al-ex-an-DRY-nus
alexandrina, alexandrenum
From Alexandria, Egypt.
algeriensis  al-jir-EE-EN-sis
algeriensis, algeriense
Algerian.
alienus  a-LY-en-us
aliena, alienum
A plant of foreign origin.

amurensis  am-or-EN-sis
amurensis, amurense
From the Amur River region, Asia.
anatolicus  an-ah-TOH-lee-kus
anatolica, alitolicum
From Anatolia, Turkey.
ancyrensis  an-syr-EN-sis
ancyrensis, ancyrene
From Ankara, Turkey.

Where Plants Come From
Where Plants Come From
Today Linnaeus is most remembered for the binomial, or two word, system of naming plants that he developed and refined from the earlier work of Caspar Bauhin (1560–1624). Using the binomial method of nomenclature, a plant is first attributed to a particular genus then given its specific species name. The species may then be subdivided into subspecies, variety, and form for greater clarity of identification. Linnaeus based his classification of plants on their sexual characteristics, dividing plants into groups depending on the number of stamens and pistils (the sexual organs of plants). He was aware that this was an artificial structure and it was later superseded by a natural botanical system after his death. This emphasis on the reproductive aspects of plants led Linnaeus to use some rather fanciful language, describing plants in terms such as “brides,” “bridegrooms,” and “bridal beds.”

Linnaeus published numerous works throughout his career. Among his most influential is *Systema naturae* (1735), this was originally produced as a pamphlet outlining his new system of classifying the natural world. He continued to extend the work over the following decades, until it became a two-volume publication in 1758. His *Genera plantarum* (1737) describes in detail all the 935 plant genera that were then known. This was followed in 1753 by *Species plantarum*. Describing thousands of plant species, it became the basis for modern nomenclature. Linnaeus’s system of classification enabled scientists to fit previously unidentified plants and animals into a sound framework of knowledge, based on empirical observation. Thus they began to see how one species related to another. This came at a time when huge amounts of new plant material was being introduced into Europe from all over the world.

The importance of Linnaeus’s work was fully recognized in his lifetime. He became Court Physician in 1747, was made a Knight of the Polar Star in 1758, and was finally ennobled in 1761, taking the title of Carl von Linné. After a series of debilitating strokes, he died aged 71.

Methodical, practical, and rational, Linnaeus was, despite the occasional literary flight of fancy, a master of precise and accurate simplification. In tribute, the later Swedish writer August Strindberg (1849–1912) said “Linnaeus was in reality a poet who happened to become a naturalist.”
flavens, flaveolus FLA–vens
flaveola, flaveolum, flavescens, flavidus (flavia, flavidum)
All these terms mean yellowish in color.

flavicoma, flavidum
Yellow-haired.

flavispina, flavispinum
Yellow-spined.

ferrugineus fer-oo-jIN-ee-us
Rust-colored.

flameus FLAM mee-us
Flame-colored or flame-like.

flavicomus flav-ih-KOH-mus
flavicoma, flavicomum
Yellow-haired.

flavispinus flav-ih-SPIN-us
flavispina, flavispinum
Yellow-spined.

ferruginea, ferrugineum
Rust-colored.

flavicomus flav-ih-KOH-mus
flavicoma, flavicomum
Yellow-haired.

flavispinus flav-ih-SPIN-us
flavispina, flavispinum
Yellow-spined.

flavissimus flav-ISS-ih-mus
flavissima, flavissimum
Deepest yellow.

flavovirens flav-oh-VY-rens
Greenish yellow.

flavus FLA–vus
flava, flavum
Pure yellow.

flore-albo FLOR-ee AL-bo
With white flowers.

fucatus few-KAY-tus
fucata, fucatum
Painted or dyed.

fuliginosus few-lih-gin-OH-sus
fuliginosa, fuliginosum
A dirty brown or sooty color.

fulvidus FUL-vee-dus
fulvida, fulvidum
Slightly tawny in color.

fulvus ful-VES-enz
fulva, fluvum
All these terms mean tawny-orange in color.

fulvus ful-VES-enz
fulva, fluvum
All these terms mean tawny-orange in color.

fusco-rubra FUS-koh ROO-bra
Brownish red.

fuscus FUS-kus
fuscata, fuscum
A dusky or swarthy brown.

fusco-rubra FUS-koh ROO-bra
Brownish red.

fuscus FUS-kus
fuscata, fuscum
A dusky or swarthy brown.

fuscifolius few-ski-FOH-lee-us
fusco-rubra FUS-koh ROO-bra
Brownish red.

fuscus FUS-kus
fuscata, fuscum
A dusky or swarthy brown.

fuscus FUS-kus
fuscata, fuscum
A dusky or swarthy brown.

The appearance of the bright yellow flowers of Crocus flavus “Golden Yellow” (syn. “Dutch Yellow” and “Yellow Mammoth”) are always a welcome sight in the grey days of late winter. This delightful plant is hardy and, given well-drained soil and a sunny position, will self-seed and spread quickly. An old variety, “Golden Yellow” is both free flowering and fragrant.