Guidelines for Writing Gardening Articles

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Audience
- You are writing for a broad audience, some experienced gardeners and some complete novices.
- Use words that are familiar to your audience and avoid jargon and technical terms (e.g. "trees and shrubs" rather than "woody ornamentals").

Style and point of view
- Keep your audience in mind. Provide an answer to a question or help them solve a problem. The writing should be about the customer, the problem they face, and information that can help them.
- If your writing answers the questions people are searching for on the Internet, using the terms they are using, then it becomes more Internet "search friendly."
- The more questions you can answer in the same piece, around the same topic, the better—but they do have to be related and pertinent to the subject matter.
- Be careful that your article does not start to read like an FAQ (unless it really is an FAQ).
- Use active voice whenever possible. (E.g. "Purchase an instrument to measure light." Not, "An instrument to measure light can be purchased."
- You may use first-person voice, especially when sharing advise from your own gardening experience. (E.g. In a review of the types of celery and how to grow them, the author had a favorite cutting celery and simply wrote: "My favorite cutting celery is 'Affina'."
- Bullets are helpful if you are listing plants or giving step-by-step instruction.

Newsworthiness
- We want to feature trends in gardening, newer cultivars of plants, unusual or hard-to-find plants that we know are garden worthy—inspiration for aspiring gardeners paired with steps they can take to achieve their goals.
- An article may discuss current weather conditions or a current pest. However, these pieces will be published as "news items" rather than evergreen articles and will expire when they are no longer relevant.
- It is OK to repurpose content you have written. Review it to ensure the information is still relevant to the readers, and refreshed and updated, if need be.

Integrity
- Remember that all information must be research based.
- Ideally, articles should be a synthesis of information seen through the lens of your own gardening experience.
- Do not plagiarize! If information should be cited.

Length
Concise writing is best. There is no set length for what makes a good article or news piece. It just needs to adequately convey the message, or provide enough details to solve the problem, tell the story, etc. It could be 700-900 words or longer, or it could be as short as 300 words.

Botanical nomenclature:
The first time you introduce a plant in the article, write the common name and include the botanical name in parentheses right after. Within the article you can switch back and forth to avoid monotony.
 Exceptions would be plants like tomato, which would be somewhat pretentious to write about as *Solanum lycopersicum.* It might add interest to your article to identify the botanical name of a plant, but then abandon it and stick with the common name in this case.

There are some exceptions to this rule, but generally this is what you'll write:

Common name (all lower case unless the common name includes a proper noun), followed by genus and species name, italicized and within parentheses, for example:

German iris (*Iris germanica*)

sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*)

Plants are usually known by their cultivar names. Cultivar names are not italicized, but they are capitalized, and the specific name is contained within single quotes; for example, *Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy' would be written

'Forest Pansy' redbud (*Cercis canadensis* 'Forest Pansy')

Varieties and other hybrid rules:

Varieties, which are naturally occurring plants that reproduce true to type, are identified like this:

white redbud (*Cercis canadensis* var. *alba)*

Note that "var." is not italicized or capitalized.

Seed mixes are a mix of several cultivars and do not need to be set off in single quotes: For example:

Zinnia elegans Berry Basket Mix

Interspecies cross would have an "×" in the middle; for example:

saucer magnolia (*Magnolia* × *soulangiana),* which is a cross between *M. denudata* and *M. liliiflora*

Note that once a genus has been identified, it can be abbreviated by its first letter, with the species following, as I've done with the parents of the saucer magnolia.

An intergeneric cross is preceded by an "×" and followed by the new genus epithet **without** a space in between. For example, the cross of foamflower (*Tiarella* spp.) and coral bells (*Heuchera* spp.) is written:

×*Heucherella*

Most often it would be followed by a cultivar name written in the typical fashion (upper case, not italicized, with single quotes); for example:

×*Heucherella* 'Alabama Sunrise'

In both cases the "×" is not italicized or capitalized.

spp. and sp.:

If you are talking about genera (i.e., multiple species of a genus), write the botanical name followed by "spp."; for example:

Astilbe spp.

In the case of astilbe, its common and botanical name are the same. I was surprised to discover that it's also known as false goatsbeard! So, if later in the article you wanted to talk about astilbe species, you can do it that way.

If you unsure of what species or cultivar an individual plant is (for example, if you are visiting a garden or the tag is long gone), you can identify it simply by its genus followed by "sp." For example:

An image might have a pretty pink phlox and you can just call it *Phlox* sp.

Both spp. and sp. are not capitalized or italicized.

An excellent reference for proper nomenclature is the Missouri Botanical Garden website, at www.missouribotanicalgarden.org.