How to Read Plant Tags and Labels

The plant records office at Royal Botanical Gardens is responsible for tracking all plants in our cultivated gardens. To do this, plants are given accession numbers*. This number links the information held in the plant records database to the living specimen in the garden. The plant records database contains information such as the plant provenance*, nomenclature*, plant verification* and plant health. This information adds research value to each and every plant in the garden. To ensure this link is maintained, plants at Royal Botanical Gardens have a dual labelling system – accession tags and plant display labels. If a tag or a label goes missing, it is replaced as soon as possible.

**Accession tags (Primary Labels)**

An accession tag is a small aluminium strip bearing the plant's accession number, botanical name and garden location code*. These tags are attached to woody plants using vinyl-coated wire. The tag remains fixed to the plant as it moves around from propagation to various planting sites within the garden. With perennial plants a similar system is used where the tag is attached to a wire stake and inserted into the ground (or pot) where the plant is planted.

Tags read as follows:

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20080049A
Liriodendron tulipifera
‘Aureomarginatum’
AR-AV-1
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- Accession Number and Qualifier
- Botanical Name (Species, cultivar)
- Garden Location Code

**Plant Display Labels (Secondary Labels)**

These are the larger aluminium labels that are attached to stakes or attached directly onto larger plants such as trees and are the media by which plant information and identification are communicated to the visitors. They are designed to be visible to viewers but not to be overwhelming within the garden. It is important that the labels are uniform; however it is sometimes necessary to highlight different information, based on the plant collection. For this reason a number of templates have been created, all of which have consistent placement for botanical name, plant family and accession number.
For Example:

A species plant label looks like this:

- **Beaked Hazel**
- **Noisetier à Long Bec**
- **Corylus cornuta subsp. cornuta**
- **North America**
- **Family: Betulaceae**
- **20080191F**

- **English Common Name**
- **French Common Name**
- **Botanical Name (Genus, specific epithet and subspecies)**
  *When you see a Genus followed by sp. the species name is unknown*
- **Native Range**
- **Plant Family**
- **Accession Number and Qualifier**

A cultivated plant label looks like this:

- **Hybrid Tea Rose**
- **Rosier Hybrides de Thé**
- **Rosa ‘Fryglitzy’**
- **Sold as: ROTARY SUNRISE**
- **Fryer – United Kingdom – 2004**
- **Family: Rosaceae**
- **20090185A**

- **English Common Name or Horticultural Division**
- **French Common Name**
- **Botanical Name (Genus, Cultivar)**
  *This field is sometimes populated with cv., cultivar name is unknown*
- **Trademark Designation**
- **Hybridizer – Origin – Year Introduced**
- **Plant Family**
- **Accession Number and Qualifier**
Taking a little time to learn about, read and understand plant labels can provide a wealth of information about each plant in the garden. If you notice a plant missing an accession tag or label, be sure to let the gardener know who will pass the information on to the plant records office.

*The accession number of a plant reads as follows: 850342A = the 342\textsuperscript{nd} plant accessioned in 1985 or 20080184A = the 184\textsuperscript{th} plant accessioned in 2008. This reveals the age of the plant and the sequence in which it was accessioned that year. An accession number is applied to plants of the same name, acquired from the same place, at the same time. This can be a single plant or multiple plants. To distinguish between plants within an accession, an alphabetical qualifier is used at the end of the accession number.*

*Plant provenance refers to the origin of a plant. This can refer to a precise location in the wild or a cultivated origin.*

*Plant nomenclature refers to the proper naming of plants using the binomial naming system. Binomial nomenclature is applied to plants around the world and assists with effective communication of plant names on a global scale.*

*Plant verification is the process by which a plant is indentified to ensure the proper name is applied. It is often necessary to verify living accessions due to cross-pollination, cultivar reversion or simply because the label has gone missing.*

*The garden location code refers to the grid system applied to the cultivated gardens; used to facilitate the tracking of plants. The cultivated garden is broken into small sections, each of which is given a code. Inventories are then maintained for each location.*