By Kylee Baumle

Flowers are blooming at Our Little Acre again! My first amaryllis of the season broke bud just last week and marks the beginning of a winter full of color in containers inside the house.

My love affair with amaryllis began about eight years ago, around the time I came down with gardening fever and I've amassed quite a collection of them.

I'd been looking through the many seed and plant catalogs that started arriving around Thanksgiving, when a striped wonder caught my eye. I was smitten by its unusual blooms, not having seen anything like it before. That wasn't really saying much, since I'd been too busy working and raising kids to pay a whole lot of attention to flowers up to that point. But that flower was something special.

Even now, this many years later, that beautiful amaryllis, Hippeastrum papilio, still holds sway over me. Though the double white blooms of 'Blossom Peacock' with its red-tinged petals is one of my favorites and I find the spidery form of 'La Paz' to be fascinating, none of them thrills me more than H. papilio.

In Latin botanical names, the first word denotes the genus and the second one, the species. Oftentimes, the species name also describes a characteristic of the plant. For example, the botanical name for a common tree around here – the white oak – is Quercus alba. All trees that are oaks will be named Quercus but since alba is Latin for white, only the white oak will bear this specific name.

In the case of my favorite amaryllis, Hippeastrum is the genus and the species is papilio, which means butterfly in Latin. That's an appropriate name for this particular amaryllis, because its petals do indeed resemble a butterfly's wings when opening. Other species names are just as telling: caeruleus means it has a blue color, hirsutus means it's hairy or fuzzy, repens or reptans means it creeps or crawls. This

can be helpful information to keep in mind when you're looking for a specific type of plant for an area in your garden, whether it's because of color, its growth habit, or some other characteristic.

Both genus and species names can also be in honor of the person who discovered it. Solidago shortii is a goldenrod first found by William Short. In the case of the flower Fuchsia, the genus was named for the German botanist, Leonhart Fuchs, although it was French botanist Charles Plumier that discovered and named it.

The Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus started all this naming business back in the 1700s so you can blame him for such monstrosities as Ornithogalum adseptentrionesvergentulum, which is a spring bulb similar to the white one we know as Star of Bethlehem. And those asters that bloom so nicely in the fall? Symphyotrichum novae-angliae is what most of us call a New England aster or just plain hardy aster.

The common names have their own issues. You can grow Dragon Tongue beans, Monkey Puzzle tree, Sneezeweed, Corpse plant, Hairy Balls, and Naked Ladies.

And then, there's Bleeding Heart, which means two different plants, depending on where you live. The Bleeding Heart we grow here is the perennial Dicentra spectabilis and has blooms that really do look like hearts. In the south, however, Bleeding Heart likely means Clerondendrum thomsoniae, a vining plant that typically has clusters of white and red blooms.

You can see that sometimes it's important to be aware of the Latin names for plants even if they are hard to remember or hard to say. They serve an identification purpose that's helpful to more than just botanists.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at www.ourlittleacre.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre. Contact her at PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com.