



The correct gender of *Schinus* (Anacardiaceae)

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Species of the genus *Schinus* Linnaeus (1753) (Anacardiaceae) are native to the Americas but are found in many tropical and subtropical parts of the world, where they are cultivated as ornamentals or crops (“pink peppercorns”) or they are invasive weeds. *Schinus molle* L. (1753: 388) is a cultivated ornamental tree in Australia, California, Mexico, the Canary Islands, the Mediterranean, and elsewhere (US Forest Service 2015). In Hawaii, Florida, South Africa, Mascarene Islands, and Australia, *Schinus terebinthifolia* Raddi (1820: 399) is an aggressively invasive pest plant, costing governments millions of dollars in damages and control (Ferriter 1997).

Despite being an important and widely known genus, the gender of the genus name is a source of tremendous nomenclatural confusion, if one judges from the orthographic variants of the species epithets. Of the 38 accepted species and infraspecific taxa on The Plant List (theplantlist.org, ver. 1.1), one is a duplicated name, 18 are masculine epithets (but ten of these are substantive epithets honoring men and are thus properly masculine [Nicolson 1974]), 12 are feminine epithets (one of which, *arenicola*, is always feminine [Stearn 1983]), and seven have epithets that are the same in any gender (or have no gender, as in the case of *S. molle* for which Linnaeus used a common name as the epithet).

Although Linnaeus (1753) used epithets in *Schinus* that are either invariant in gender or nouns in apposition, later authors used either masculine or feminine epithets. Engler (1876, 1881b), Cabrera (1938), Johnston (1938) and Barkley (1944) were consistent in their use of the masculine. Inexplicitly, The Plant List gives some epithets as feminine, despite their original publication in the masculine. Thus, for example, The Plant List cites *S. pilifera* I. M. Johnst. (originally published as *S. piliferus* I. M. Johnst. 1938: 256) and *S. montana* Engl. (originally published as *S. montanus* Engl. 1881a: 422). Other masculine epithets are left unchanged, e.g. *S. microphyllus* I. M. Johnst. (1938: 258) and *S. spinosus* Engl. (1876: 388). The inconsistency of usage spills over into the scientific literature: a Google Scholar search (18 May 2015) revealed ca. 6850 articles for “*Schinus terebinthifolius*” and only ca. 560 for “*Schinus terebinthifolia*,” 299 results for “*Schinus patagonicus*” and 50 for “*Schinus patagonica*.” The gender of adjectival epithets must follow that of the genus, but at the root of the confusion is this: What is the gender of the genus name *Schinus*? Kelsey and Dayton (1942) stated unequivocally that the genus name is feminine; Coombes (2008) claimed with equal certainty that it is masculine.

According to Quattrocchi (1999), *Schinus* is a Latinized name derived from *schinos*, σχίνος, the Greek word (feminine) for the mastic, *Pistacia lentiscus* Linnaeus (1753: 1026) (Morwood & Taylor 2002, Knight 2003). In keeping with the botanical tradition of trees having feminine generic names, we may expect *Schinus*—a tree—to be feminine, as are *Fagus* L., *Ilex* L., *Laurus* L., *Morus* L., *Nyctanthes* L., *Pinus* L., *Quercus* L., and many other Linnaean tree names (Gledhill 2008). This classical tradition continues in modern botanical nomenclature (Bullock 1958, Manara 1991).

The gender of generic names has been addressed by Bullock (1958), Nicolson and Steyskal (1976) and Manara (1991). Both Bullock (1958) and Manara (1991) attributed some of the confusion regarding generic names to the lack of training in classical languages among modern botanists (and surely the problem has only worsened since Bullock and Manara expressed their opinions). While recent changes to the code of nomenclature have eliminated the need for composing Latin descriptions or diagnoses (much to the relief of many taxonomists!), some knowledge of botanical Latin is required in order to coin adjectival epithets that agree in gender with the genus name. When difficulties arise, the gender of generic names is addressed directly in Article 62 of the Melbourne Code (McNeill *et al.* 2011), which states:

62.1. A generic name retains the gender assigned by nomenclatural tradition, irrespective of classical usage or the author’s original usage. A generic name without a nomenclatural tradition retains the gender assigned by its author (but see Art. 62.4). [Article 62.4 applies to generic names ending in *-anthes*, *-oides*, *-odes* or *-ites* and is irrelevant to the case of *Schinus*.]