

"Just Add Water"

Articles and Photos by Soni Forsman

Waterlily or Water Lily One Word or Two?

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When I type waterlily into google search, it asks 'did you mean water lily' or it automatically changes it. I began writing the name of my favorite plant as one word following the decision of the Water Lily Society to change the spelling - water lily to waterlily. It based its decision on historical horticultural writings and a significant horticultural structure.

In 1998, the Water Lily Society board of directors voted to change the name of the organization to the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society (IWGS) to reflect all things water gardening, rather than just one aquatic plant. At the same time, it changed water lily to waterlily.

Discussion about the spelling began more than a decade before. An article in the first issue of The Water Lily Journal, March 1985, was titled 'Water Lily or Water-Lily or Waterlily.' It stated 'this is not an earth-shattering question' but asked members to state their preference. The June 1985 Journal reports that water lily won. And, so it remained two words until the 1998 board meeting in Washington DC.

Leaders of the IWGS argued for the one-word spelling based on the book, **Standardized Plant Names, a Catalogue of Approved Scientific and Common Names of Plants in American Commerce** published in 1923 by the American Commerce Joint Committee on Horticultural Nomenclature.

The joint committee wrote that 'whenever a common name properly belonging to one genus is used as name for a plant of some other genus, it is to be used only as part of a compound name, either with a hyphen or one word. But hyphens are to be avoided where not clearly desirable.'

Many plants have lily in their common name but are unrelated to the true lily, *Lilium*. Because the usage of lily was fixed in common usage, the joint committee applied its rule of making the two words one. Examples include daylily and waterlily.

Even earlier, Henry S. Conrad authored the book **The Waterlilies: a Monograph of the Genus *Nymphaea***. It was published in 1905 and is considered a foundation for the serious study of waterlilies. For many years, Conrad was the 'father of waterlilies.'

Waterlily as one word predates Conrad's book and the joint committee. In 1852, the Kew Gardens in London built a glass structure to grow the giant *Victoria amazonica*. The building was named the Waterlily House.

And, that is the short story of why the IWGS changed water lily to waterlily and I write WATERLILY.



Nymphaea 'Jennifer Rebecca' (tropical night-blooming waterlily)