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COLUMNS

Campbell Vaughn: Landscaping terms can get confusing. Here's a short guide to help.

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It is so easy to forget how complicated subject specific vocabulary is to others when you are so used to saying things around your peers.

When I started with UGA Extension, I couldn't believe how many acronyms we used. People mentioned things like OLOD and PDC in everyday conversation while I nodded and said things like, "Oh, yeah," and, "Definitely," while not having a clue as to what they were saying. It happens in hospitals, lawyers' offices, schools and even in gardening.

I do my best to try and remember that not everyone knows as much as I do in the gardening/landscape world. Since my job is essentially as an educator, I need to make sure I don't bore you with dull academic terminology that will get you looking for something else to read before my first paragraph is done.

There is a need for academic terms because common language can be vague. And I will warn you that what I am about to write below might come across as vague.

Here is some of the terminology I use often that I will try to simplify:

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Systemic: I use this term often when prescribing pesticides. Unlike things you spray that kill pest by being touched with a chemical, systemics are absorbed and

fed to a pest internally. A good example is treatment for scale insects on camellias. Horticulture oils are a great treatment as a spray-on killer by covering the scale and killing it by contact. If the plant is too large to cover the whole thing with a contact killer, we use a systemic insecticide instead. The insecticide is put around the plant and the roots absorb it, disperse the chemical throughout the plant and then when an insect takes a bite it dies.

N,P,K: Nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. These are the three numbers on all bags of fertilizers. Nitrogen makes it green and grow up. Phosphorus makes it bloom, and potassium makes the roots healthy. That is the extremely simple version of what these major elements do to a plant. I use numbers like 16-4-8, 15-0-15 and 14-7-7 often when making a recommendation for a fertilizer for a specific crop/grass/shrub. Those numbers are the percentage of these elements in the bag of fertilizer. With a 40-pound bag of 16-4-8, there is 6.4 pounds of nitrogen, 1.6 pounds of phosphorus and 3.2 pounds of potassium in each container. The rest is up to the manufacturer. Different plants need different amounts of each of these elements at different times of the year.

Campbell Vaughn: [Sourwood, goldenrod, oakleaf hydrangea among top native plants for Georgia](#)

Annual/perennial: These two terms are often used in weeds and flowers. Annuals complete their life cycle within one growing season. They produce seeds around the time hospice is called in and disperse it the best way they can, hoping their family might live on next season. Heat and cold are the usual suspects for ending an annual plant's life. Crabgrass and impatiens are good examples of annuals. Perennials are plants that survive multiple seasons by establishing a root system that does not die every year. The roots store enough energy and produce leaves and flowers the following year. Plants like Black Eyed Susan and daylilies are considered perennial in our area. Technically things like azaleas are perennial, but again we use the term mainly for weeds and flowers.

Herbaceous: Plants whose leaves die all the way to the ground (usually at frost)

but have a healthy established root system are considered herbaceous. All the leaves freeze and shrivel to the ground, but the roots are still growing getting ready for conditions to get right to try it again later when the weather gets nicer. Hosta and daylilies are good examples of herbaceous perennials.

These are a few of my commonly used terms that I try and make sure everyone knows what I am talking about before I use them too regularly. I hope my PDC approves of this article and sends it to OLOD for further distribution.