

Activity 2

Construction and Use of Taxonomic keys

Specimen determination plays a key role in all taxonomic work. This process involves a) comparison of plant samples with named plant specimens, and b) determination of the correct name applicable to that plant. Aids to identification have been developed so that with sufficient training and practice, researchers and students engaged in taxonomic work, and even the layman, will be able to identify plant groups in local flora with lesser difficulty. For beginners who would like to embark in this kind of activity, it is necessary to have at least a working knowledge of plant vegetative and reproductive terminologies, as well as familiarity with the principles of plant nomenclature.

The names or labels assigned to plants form a part of the system of information retrieval that the science of Systematics provides, and so in order not to defeat the purpose, accurate identification should be made at all times. By doing so, valuable knowledge from this information-retrieval mechanism can be made available to various fields of biology, such as ecology, genetics, biogeography, biochemistry, physiology, and the like.

The most common way of identifying plants besides consulting a book (example, a monograph), looking at a stack of previously named herbarium specimens for comparison, or inquiring from an expert, is through the use of a taxonomic key. A key is a device for identifying an unknown plant; it provides the correct identity of a specimen by a process of elimination. It is made up of statements that present contrasting characters, and each time a choice is made, one or more taxa are eliminated.

In using a taxonomic key, the following guidelines (Jones and Luchsinger, 1987) should be considered:

- 1) Be sure that the specimen on hand is complete (with vegetative and reproductive characters intact).
- 2) Select keys appropriate for the plant specimen and for the geographic area where the plant was obtained.
- 3) Familiarize yourself with all the technical terms found in each choice. For this purpose, it is essential that you consult a glossary of vegetative and reproductive terminologies.
- 4) Always read both choices or both leads of the couplet carefully, observing punctuation.
- 5) Do not base your decisions on a single observation especially when measurements are involved; examine several specimens.
- 6) If you are not confident about which lead to take, try both of them to see where they will lead.
- 7) If the specimen does not seem to fit the key and all choices are unlikely, it pays to make an educated guess and retrace your steps.
- 8) Compare the specimen with an illustration, a technical description, or with a herbarium specimen as a way of verifying your choices.
- 9) Always remember that the use of keys becomes easier with practice and familiarity.
- 10) If the specimen cannot be identified even if it has been carefully keyed out, it should be sent to an expert for determination.

It is often more practical to use a key which is diagnostic, that is, one that identifies an unknown plant by presenting only the conspicuous features by which the plant groups can be recognized. Diagnostic characters are sometimes called "key characters". Likewise, most keys found in manuals, books, and on-line are dichotomous, i.e., a pair of contrasting characters at each step is being presented. There are different formats for arranging the couplets in the key, the most common of which are the bracket and indented keys. You were already familiarized with these key types in the lecture (both Plant and Animal Systematics) and have learned that each type has its own advantages and disadvantages. Nevertheless, these two formats serve their purpose well and therefore have gained general acceptance.

As a Biology student, you should have the knack not only in using a key but also on how to construct one especially if you plan to undertake a thesis pertaining to inventories and surveys of plant groups

Construction Of Taxonomy Keys

George C. Becker, Tom R. Johnson



Construction Of Taxonomy Keys:

Plant Systematics Gurcharan Singh, 2004 The book strikes a balance between classical fundamental information and the recent developments in plant systematics Special attention has been devoted to the information on botanical nomenclature identification and phylogeny of angiosperms with numerous relevant examples and detailed explanation of the important nomenclatural problems An attempt has been made to present a continuity between orthodox and contemporary identification methods by working on a common example The methods of identification using computers have been further explored to help better online identification The chapter on cladistic methods has been totally revised and molecular systematics discussed in considerable detail Jacket Computer Programs for Specimen Identification, Key Construction and Description Printing Using Taxonomic Data Matrices Larry E. Morse, 1974 A Taxonomic Study of Saccharum Sinense Roxb. and S. Berberi Jeswiet Ernst Artschwager, 1954 Vascular Plant Taxonomy Dirk R. Walters, 1996 **Basic data; taxonomic key to lens design** Keystone View Company, Thaddeus R. Murroughs, 1961 **Angiosperms** Pooja, 2004 Contents Introduction Plant Nomenclature Principle of Plant Taxonomy Origin of Angiosperms Phytography Biosystematics Preparation of Herbarium Plants Identification Ranunculaceae Rosaceae Papaveraceae Cruciferae Cucurbitaceae Malvaceae Leguminosae Umbelliferae Solanaceae Convolvulaceae Rubiaceae Compositae Labitae Apocynaceae Asclepiadaceae Amaranthaceae Orchidaceae Liliaceae Plamae Gramineae *A New Method for Creating a Visual Plant Identification Key* Rebecca A. Dellinger-Johnston, 2015 Taxonomic keys are essential tools for species identification used by students and professional biologists In recent years advancements in photography have allowed these keys to host high quality photographs for aid in identification However most modern keys still rely heavily on text rather than images Using text alone limits the user to a discrete number of characters often described in esoteric terms In order to create more effective keys we developed a new method for constructing image based taxonomic keys These keys replace written characters with images allowing the user to identify species using visual pattern recognition rather than interpreting written text In addition we constructed our visual key using data on how different users assess the visual similarities between plant species To ensure the strength of this methodology our key focuses on the morphologically diverse genus Quercus A set of standardized photographs was taken of forty three species of oak native or naturalized in the Southeast These photographs were used to create a survey on how botanical experts and botanical novices rate the pair wise similarity of different oak leaves The mean of each rating was summarized into a distance matrix which was then converted into a dendrogram From the resulting dendrogram a visual key was constructed using the standardized photographs of oak leaves The key was then tested on against an existing dichotomous key using botanical novices and botanical experts The resulting two sample t tests between the two identification keys demonstrated that users with our visual key produced between 22 30% more correct answers than users with the traditional key Using this method of key creation innovative keys could be constructed for other fields of

biology Abstract from author supplied metadata *Manual of Herbarium Taxonomy* E. F. de Vogel, 1987 *Taxonomic Keys to the Common Animals of the North Central States* Samuel Eddy, Alexander Carlton Hodson, 1982 The Role of Culture Collections in the Era of Molecular Biology American Type Culture Collection, 1976 **Taxonomy of West African Flowering Plants** Omotoye Olorode, 1984 *Methods of Descriptive Systematic Botany* Albert Spear Hitchcock, 1925
Plant Systematics Samuel B. Jones, Arlene E. Luchsinger, 1986 **Journal of the Minnesota Academy of Science**, 1987 Freshwater Macroinvertebrates of Northeastern North America Barbara Lynn Peckarsky, 1990 A guide to the identification of insects and other macroinvertebrates found in bodies of freshwater in northeastern North America
 Essentially a collection of regional taxonomic keys it covers the aquatic and semiaquatic life stages of insects as well as freshwater crustaceans mites mollusks oligochaetes and leeches Each chapter begins with a brief natural history of the taxon and a discussion of collection and preservation techniques Following is a checklist of the families and genera or in the noninsect chapters higher taxa of the animals included in the key Most of the chapter is devoted to the key a series of concise couplets well illustrated with many diagnostic drawings Annotation copyrighted by Book News Inc Portland OR **IMS Newsletter**, 1990 Proceedings of the 1st International Workshop on Biotaxonomy, Classification and Biology of Leafhoppers and Planthoppers (Auchenorrhyncha) of Economic Importance, London, 4-7 October 1982 William James Knight, 1983 Illustrated Key to the Minnows of Wisconsin George C. Becker, Tom R. Johnson, 1970 *Biological Identification with Computers* R. J. Pankhurst, 1975 *The Compass of Sigma Gamma Epsilon*, 1970

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