

From *Golden Delicious* to *Cabernet Carbon*: An Analysis of Naming Strategies in Fruit and Berry Cultivation

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abstract

This article investigates fruit- and berry- related naming practices in horticulture and viticulture from ethnolinguistic, phraseological, and onomasiological perspectives, focusing on English and German. The study examines how cultivar names encode sensory qualities, symbolic meanings, and culturally conditioned value systems, and how these elements interact with market-oriented strategies of nomination. Drawing on selected case studies of apple cultivars in English and German and fungus-resistant grape varieties developed in German-speaking regions, the analysis demonstrates that epithet-based and prestige-oriented naming models play a central role in shaping consumer perception. The findings show that fruit- and berry-related names reflect not only practical considerations of cultivation and breeding but also deeper metaphorical, sensory, and ethnocultural associations. The qualitative onomasiological analysis is complemented by a corpus-based investigation, which provides empirical evidence for regional variation in cultivar name usage and for the evaluative adjectives most frequently associated with selected variety names.

Keywords: *onomasiological approach, cultivar naming strategies, horticultural and viticultural nomenclature, ethnolinguistic symbolism, phraseological metaphor, sensory semantics, prestige-based naming, corpus linguistics*

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INTRODUCTION

Horticulture has accompanied all civilisations in which climatic conditions allowed the cultivation of fruit and berry crops, which functioned not only as sources of nourishment but also as elements of private and public ornamental spaces. Even today, many renowned gardens around the world are regarded as shared cultural treasures. History speaks of the Hanging Gardens of Semiramis as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, gardens that, according to legend, King Nebuchadnezzar built for his wife in Babylon, equipping them with an innovative and revolutionary irrigation system for its time and exceptionally rare in desert conditions (Dalley, 2013).

In everyday fruit-and-berry horticulture, which was not aimed at outstanding decorative achievements, the most important criterion and accomplishment was obtaining the best and most abundant harvest with minimal effort. Meeting these requirements became the central objective in selecting productive and stress-resistant genetic material. The successful selection of appropriate cultivars was further reinforced by proper presentation of the fresh fruit to customers, particularly through the development of names that highlighted the given variety's strongest qualities. Examples of such marketing strategies include apple cultivar names using adjectives that describe the best sides of given varieties, such as *Golden Delicious*, *Red Delicious*, or *Honeycrisp* in English-speaking regions (Janick & Moore, 1996, pp. 2–6). And words evoking prestige or status in German-speaking areas, such as *Gloster*, *Wellant*, *Kaiser Wilhelm*, *Topaz*, and others (Beratungsstelle für Obst- und Gartenbau, 2010).

The present study investigates selected English and German fruit and grape cultivar names from an onomasiological and ethnolinguistic perspective. The qualitative analysis is complemented by corpus evidence from the Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) corpus in order to examine regional variation in cultivar name usage.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. Which conceptual features motivate fruit and berry cultivar names?
2. Which naming strategies characterise English and German horticultural nomenclature?
3. To what extent are these strategies reflected in corpus evidence and what conclusions can be made?

METHODOLOGY

The research employs a qualitative–quantitative design integrating onomasiological analysis, ethnolinguistic interpretation, and corpus linguistics. The qualitative component focuses on identifying the conceptual motivations underlying cultivar names, while the quantitative component examines patterns of usage in authentic English-language discourse.

The primary dataset consists of selected fruit and grape cultivars representing different naming strategies in English and German horticultural and viticultural traditions. The material was selected according to three criteria: commercial importance, representativeness of distinct naming models, and the availability of reliable descriptive and historical documentation. The analysed examples include English-language apple cultivars (e.g., *Golden Delicious*, *Honeycrisp*, *Red Delicious*, *Idared*), German apple cultivars (e.g., *Kaiser Wilhelm*), German fungus-resistant grape cultivars (PIWI varieties), and internationally recognised wine grape varieties discussed from an onomasiological perspective.

The qualitative analysis was conducted within the framework of onomasiological theory (Štekauer, 1998), according to which lexical nomination is understood as the selection of conceptual features that motivate the creation of new names. Particular attention was paid to sensory semantics, symbolic associations, references to cultural prestige, historical allusions, and marketing-oriented naming strategies. Ethnolinguistic interpretation was applied in order to examine how these names reflect culturally conditioned perceptions of quality, tradition, and value.

The quantitative component employed the Global Web-Based English (GloWbE) corpus (Davies, 2013), comprising approximately 1.9 billion words from twenty English-speaking countries. Exact-phrase searches were performed in December 2025 to determine the regional distribution of selected cultivar names and the most frequent adjectives associated with *Golden Delicious*. Frequency values were normalised per million words to ensure comparability across regional subcorpora.

The combination of qualitative and corpus-based approaches allows the study to relate conceptual naming strategies to observable patterns of language use. Rather than treating cultivar names solely as botanical designations, the analysis demonstrates their simultaneous linguistic, cultural, and commercial functions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fruit and berry lexemes occupy a prominent position within the conceptual systems of many languages owing to their long-standing importance in agriculture, nutrition, and everyday experience. Their familiarity has contributed to the development of extensive semantic networks that include literal, figurative, symbolic, and evaluative meanings. These semantic associations provide an important foundation for the creation of cultivar names, in which lexical choices frequently reflect desirable qualities such as sweetness, colour, abundance, prestige, or authenticity.

From an onomasiological perspective, the naming of cultivars represents a process of selecting those conceptual features considered most salient by breeders, producers, or marketers. As Štekauer (1998) argues, lexical nomination is motivated by conceptual characteristics that distinguish a given object from others within the same category. In horticultural nomenclature these characteristics often include sensory properties, geographical origin, historical associations, or symbolic value.

The interpretation of cultivar names may further be supported by ethnolinguistic approaches and conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff, 1992), which explain how culturally shared associations become encoded in lexical choices. Rather than functioning merely as technical labels, cultivar names frequently evoke broader cultural expectations concerning taste, quality, tradition, or prestige. The following analysis examines how these conceptual motivations are realised in selected English and German fruit and grape cultivars.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS: EVIDENCE FROM SELECTED CULTIVARS

The selected cultivar names demonstrate that horticultural and viticultural nomenclature is rarely arbitrary. Rather, the naming process reflects deliberate conceptual choices that foreground particular sensory, historical, cultural, or symbolic characteristics of a variety. By subjecting the naming examples above to an onomasiological analysis, we may conclude that the creative approach, reinforced by epithets and by the cultivar's genuine advantages, such as its appealing appearance and flavour, as in the case of *Golden Delicious* and *Red Delicious*, likely contributed

to the worldwide recognition of these varieties. Notably, *Golden Delicious* and *Red Delicious* have historically been among the most commercially influential apple cultivars in apple sales across Europe and the United States (Janick & Moore, 1996, pp. 2-6).

“The ‘Delicious’ apple (discovered in Iowa, 1872) still dominates United States production, and ‘Golden Delicious’ (found in West Virginia, 1905) dominates Europe.” (Janick & Moore, 1996, p. 6)

Additional parallels may be found in such commercially successful cultivars as *Gala*, *Pink Lady*, and *Fuji*, whose names were deliberately crafted to evoke pleasant sensory associations, elegance, or a connection to established geographic or cultural traditions (Janick & Moore, 1996, pp. 6). These examples demonstrate how naming functions as a marketing mechanism: it not only reflects a cultivar’s characteristics but also shapes consumer expectations and purchasing behaviour. Janick and Moore (1996) suggest that the apple market sets demands for “blemish-free apples and any amount of russet ... is considered a serious defect...”. Also, according to the same work, other aspects like colour and shape are taken into consideration and influence the geographical distribution of this fruit’s varieties.

In the context of onomastic analysis, the *Golden Delicious* apple variety provides a representative example of how naming and marketing considerations merge to result in an exceptional cultivar name. The adjective *Golden* evokes the fruit’s characteristic yellow colour while also activating broader cultural associations with ripeness, value, and excellence. The adjective *Delicious* explicitly evaluates flavour quality, creating an immediately positive consumer expectation. From both onomasiological and marketing perspectives, the name performs a dual function: it identifies the cultivar while simultaneously communicating desirable product characteristics and strengthening brand recognition (Janick & Moore, 1996, pp. 2–6).

Honeycrisp, from the perspective of associative name formation, focuses on two characteristics of the fruit, flavour, encoded in the word *Honey*, which refers to the English words *honey*, and *crisp*, to convey the apple’s qualities. The flavour is described as “very sweet and aromatic” (Benivia, 2023, p. 7). From this, we can conclude that the association with honey arises from the high sugar content and aromatic quality of the fruit, directly reflecting the cultivar’s advantages to enhance its marketability and increase recognition and demand.

Idared is an American cultivar whose name is an abbreviation indicating the origin, namely the institution of the breeder, and the external characteristics. This cultivar was developed at the Agricultural Research Station of the University of Idaho in 1942, from which the first part of the name, *Ida*, originates. The second component reflects the external appearance of the fruit, namely its red colour when ripe (Benivia, 2023, p.7).

The name of the German apple cultivar *Kaiser Wilhelm* illustrates a prestige-oriented naming strategy through the use of the imperial title Kaiser (Duden, n.d.). It was introduced at the beginning of the 20th century, and the name itself refers to the notion of the German Emperor Wilhelm I, evoking figurative connections to status, authority, and reliability. Contrasting with tangible descriptive epithets that rely on sensory perception, this naming strategy is based on symbolic and historical associations, establishing a connection between the variety’s name and Germany’s cultural and social ideas, while also reflecting the cultivar’s German cultural background. (Beratungsstelle für Obst- und Gartenbau, 2010).

Within broader approaches to developing competitive cultivars, those combining robust genetic

traits with marketable naming strategies, grapevine breeding provides a particularly illustrative domain (Eibach et al., 2013, pp. 241-245; Becker, 2013, pp. 4-7). The leading institutions in the selection of disease-resistant cultivars in Germany are located in Freiburg and Geisenheim, although important contributions also come from breeding programs in Würzburg, Trier, and the Julius Kühn Institute (Jörger, 2012, pp. 16-19). The cultivars produced by these institutions have gained international recognition for their resistance to fungal diseases and for the complexity of wines produced from their fruit, but not without caveats (Becker, 2013, p. 4).

A distinctive characteristic of these German-bred cultivars is the tendency to employ lexemes of French origin when forming their names, as seen in *Souvignier Gris*, *Cabernet Carbon*, *Cabernet Cortis*, *Calardis Blanc*, *Solaris*, and *Muscaris* (Jörger, 2012, pp. 16-19). The pronunciation patterns of some of these names closely follow French phonetic traditions, for instance, the nasal vowel [ɑ̃] in *Blanc*, the uvular rhotic [ʁ] characteristic of French *r* (Paradis & Prunet, 2000). This naming practice can be linked to two principal factors. First, many of these cultivars carry partial genetic inheritance from globally renowned French wine grapes such as *Cabernet Sauvignon*, *Merlot*, *Pinot Noir*, and *Chardonnay*. Through naming, breeders sought to emphasise this prestigious lineage, thereby highlighting the improved qualities of the new, more resilient varieties. It should be noted, however, that resistant German breeding lines, referred to in German as *Pilzwidestandsfähig*—commonly abbreviated PIWI—, meaning fungus-resistant, are not pure representatives of the traditional European wine grape—*Vitis vinifera*—(Eibach et al., pp. 241-245). Their genetic makeup includes Asian and American contributions that provide enhanced resilience under adverse environmental conditions (Eibach et al., pp. 241-245; Jörger, 2012, pp. 16-19). They represent a deliberate combination of genes associated with high wine quality and those conferring strong resistance against fungal pathogens. Nevertheless, despite their mixed origin, PIWI cultivars have been officially registered within the European Union as *Vitis Vinifera* and are permitted for cultivation and wine production in many countries (Deutsches Weininstitut, n.d.).

The second core factor shaping their naming is the intentional imitation of French phonetic and morphological norms as a means of capturing global markets. Such strategies capitalise on the entrenched expectations, or, to some extent, the biases and cultural clichés, of consumers who associate superior wine quality or technical grape varieties with France (Becker, 2013). Thus, the naming of PIWI cultivars functions not only as an informative linguistic choice but also as a powerful marketing device embedded within a long-standing symbolic economy of wine culture.

The analysed naming strategy of foregrounding the desired implications is clearly visible in the grape variety name *Cabernet Cortis*, a cultivar bred at the Freiburg Research Institute. The first part of the name, *Cabernet*, aims at establishing a direct connection with the globally renowned and respected *Cabernet Sauvignon*, which presupposes a high-quality *vinifera* lineage, even though it has a small portion of non-*vinifera* genetic material (Eibach et al., 2013; Jörger, 2012). The second part, *Cortis*, aligns with Romance morphological and phonetic norms, creating the variety name that follows French cultivar nomenclature patterns. Speaking in onomasiological terms, the name features a double motivation: prestige-based association with globally famous classical French wines and grape vine cultivars is the first motivation behind naming, and marketing-based *phonetic imitation* targeted at consumer familiarity and established expectations of modern world wine culture. Thus, *Cabernet Cortis* is a vivid example of how linguistic choices in German PIWI naming incorporate simultaneously technological innovations and cultural legitimisation (Deutsches Weininstitut n.d.). The same pattern follows such varieties as: *Souvignier Gris*,

Cabernet Carol, *Calardis Blanc*, etc, but in some other cultivar names different strategies could be traced.

A slightly distinct onomasiological perspective could be perceived in the grape variety name *Solaris*, which employs symbolic-semantic motivation relying on lexemes ascribed to Latin incorporating strong positive cultural associations (Štekauer, 1998). The name consists of two Latin lexemes, the first part being *sol*—meaning *The Sun*—, and the suffix *-aris*, which could be seen as an adjective-forming part. The approximate translation of the name might be *of the Sun* expressed the idea that word-formation is driven by an onomasiological process which is based upon using a lexical unit that expresses a desirable conceptual feature via generally accepted cultural symbols. *The Sun* is an extremely relevant concept that is central to the cultivation of grapes. It presupposes *warmth*, *favourable growing conditions*, *ripeness* and *sugar accumulation*. Having chosen the Latin origin name for naming their new variety, the breeders at Freiburg highlighted the distinctive qualities of the cultivar, and, what could be even more relevant, the appearance of its bunches, featuring the light-yellow skin with slight translucency of the berries (Vitis International Variety Catalogue, n.d.). A closely related grape variety *Muscaris*, follows a similar pattern, but the emphasis is on its flavour that resembles that of *Muscat*; and the *Regent* grape variety could be ascribed to different paths of naming, due to the etymology of the lexeme used in its creation (Vitis International Variety Catalogue, n.d.).

It should be clearly stated, however, that not all German PIWI varieties strive to implement foreign influences; such cultivar names as *Johanniter*, *Bronner*, *Donauresling*, *Blütenmuskateller*, *Goldmuskateller*, and *Roesle* use German or typical for German-speaking regions lexemes, highlighting the continuity of the winemaking tradition and noble lineage of the grapes (Austria authorises, 2018; Vitis International Variety Catalogue, n.d.).

In the English-speaking countries, which mostly belong to the New World style of wine production, as the UK has not been associated with a robust wine production, the varied naming strategies are also implemented, but this process is observed in marketing and popularisation of old, well-established varieties. A prominent example of this, according to South Africa Online (2025), is the traditional Italian grape variety, known in the US, especially Californian under the name of Zinfandel (or shortened to *Zin*), in Italy however, it bears a different name, *Primitivo*, but the cultivar is said to be recognised under a range of approximately 30 names, Croatian variant *Crljenak kaštelanski* being one of them. Croatia is also the country of origin of this grape.

The difference in cultivar names in several countries signifies not only the linguistic variations across the globe, or cultural differences, it often refers to the preferred or established proper names, but even more frequent is the distinction of the wines produced from the same grape, due to the climatic conditions, or, what is usually more important, the traditional vinification in the considered areas. Although the Zinfandel's berries are of dark blue colour, making white wine from this variety in California is a common practice, which was adopted in the Blaauwklippen winery in South Africa (South Africa Online, 2025).

Zinfandel is no exception when it comes to using different names for the same variety. One of the world's Great varieties is French-bred *Syrah*, which, depending on the place of cultivation and the style of wine produced, can be referred to either as *Syrah* or *Shiraz*; the former usually referring to the French or French-style cooler climate wine, and the latter to the Australian or New World warmer climate wine and vineyards. This peculiarity of the wine naming creation is extremely interesting from the linguistic perspective in general and from the onomasiological perspective in

particular, as different grape cultivation or wine production methods, as well as vineyard locations, are often distinguished using different names for the wine created from the same variety of grapes, Syrah (Mowery, 2024). Further and much bolder considerations concerning sensory studies could be stated and researched in this respect. The question of whether the connection between different variants of naming and the taste associations of people familiar with the distinctions of the wine styles exists. Because, in contrast to the previous assumption, the connection between the name of the grape or wine style and the range of descriptive epithets is clear, and is common practice; for example, sommeliers use words like *floral*, *smoke*, *herbal*, *leather*, etc to describe the complexity of the Syrahs or Shirazes (Mowery, 2024). The matter under consideration could be expanded and result in subsequent research on references to sensory studies of wine tasting.

CORPUS EVIDENCE FROM GLOBAL ENGLISH

To complement the qualitative analysis, a corpus-based investigation was conducted using the Global Web-Based English —GloWbE— corpus (Davies, 2013). The corpus comprises approximately 1.9 billion words collected from twenty English-speaking countries and is particularly suitable for examining regional variation in lexical usage. Exact-phrase searches were carried out in December 2025, and frequency values were normalised per million words to facilitate comparison among regional subcorpora.

The corpus analysis pursued two objectives. First, it examined the geographical distribution of selected fruit and grape cultivar names across regional varieties of English. Second, it analysed the evaluative adjectives most frequently associated with Golden Delicious in authentic language use. The corpus findings are intended to complement, rather than replace, the qualitative onomasiological interpretation presented in the preceding sections.

The first part of the analysis examines the occurrence frequency of apple cultivar names across different national varieties of English (Table 1).

Table 1

The occurrence frequency of Golden Delicious, Idared, Honeycrisp, and Red Delicious (Davies, 2013).

Cultivar	US	GB	CA	AU	NZ	IE	All
Golden Delicious	18	15	16	3	9	5	81
Idared	3	-	2	-	-	1	10
Honeycrisp	7	1	12	3	-	-	24
Red Delicious	18	5	1	3	8	1	54

The results indicate that Golden Delicious displays the highest overall frequency across nearly all regional varieties of English. Red Delicious shows particularly high frequencies in the United States and New Zealand, while being comparatively rare in other regions, with limited presence in British English. Honeycrisp is most strongly associated with North American varieties of English, especially those of the United States and Canada, whereas Idared appears to be almost exclusively confined to North American usage. These distributional patterns reflect both the geographical origins of the cultivars and their commercial prominence in specific markets (Davies, 2013).

The second part of the corpus analysis addresses grape varieties that exist under multiple names and exhibit regionally conditioned usage preferences (Table 2).

Table 2

The occurrence frequency of Zinfandel, Primitivo, Shiraz, and Syrah (Davies 2013).

Variety	US	GB	CA	AU	NZ	IE	All
Zinfandel	63	27	19	5	5	25	218
Primitivo	9	16	2	2	-	57	133
Shiraz	112	190	74	310	85	40	1463
Syrah	126	92	50	21	134	40	611

The data clearly show that Zinfandel occurs with significantly higher frequency in American English, while Primitivo is more characteristic of European contexts. A similar tendency can be observed for Shiraz, which is extremely popular in Australia and New Zealand. In contrast to Australia, where the alternative name Syrah occurs less frequently, New Zealand uses Syrah even more often than Shiraz. This difference can be attributed to the fact that both stylistic variants of wine produced from the same grape variety coexist in New Zealand, owing to the country's climatic conditions, which allow for both warmer- and cooler-climate expressions. In this context, Shiraz typically denotes the warmer-climate style, whereas Syrah refers to the cooler-climate variant. Other regions employ both names depending on the origin of the imported wine and the stylistic traditions of wine production (Davies, 2013).

The third component of the corpus-based analysis focuses on the adjectives most frequently occurring with Golden Delicious (Table 3).

The adjectives listed in the data table retrieved from GloWbE display mostly positive characteristics and support the claim that descriptions accompanying variety names are intended to highlight the advantages of the fruit produced by the cultivars, however, a small number of context-dependent or negative modifiers occur. In this case, the most frequent adjectives relate to colour, reflecting the description of various phenomena associated with cultivation and the visual appearance of the fruit. In addition, a range of adjectives referring to fruit quality can be observed, including *sweet, sunny, royal, ripe, popular, crisp, nice, large, fragrant, and finest* (Davies, 2013). All corpus queries were conducted in December 2025 using exact-phrase searches. Frequencies were normalized per million words to ensure comparability across regional subcorpora.

Table 3

The adjectives that are most frequently used with Golden Delicious (Davies, 2013).

Adjective	Frequency
RED	6
DKNY	4
ORANGE	3
YELLOW	1
SWEET	1
SUNNY	1
SIMILAR	1
RUSSET-RESISTANT	1
ROYAL	1
RIPE	1
POPULAR	1
CRISP	1
NICE	1
MODERN	1
MEDIUM	1
MEALY	1
LARGE	1
INFAMOUS	1
FRAGRANT	1
FINEST	1
FILTHY	1

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that naming strategies in fruit and berry cultivation constitute a linguistically motivated and culturally embedded process shaped by sensory experience, symbolic associations, historical references, and commercial considerations. The analysed apple and grape cultivar names reveal that lexical nomination extends well beyond simple identification, functioning simultaneously as a means of communicating quality, evoking cultural values, and influencing consumer perception.

From an onomasiological perspective, the findings show that cultivar names are motivated by the deliberate selection of salient conceptual features. English apple cultivars predominantly employ descriptive epithets emphasising taste, colour, texture, and other sensory characteristics, whereas German naming practices demonstrate a broader use of historical, prestige-oriented, and culturally symbolic motivations. In the case of German PIWI grape cultivars, French- and Latin- derived lexical elements frequently serve to evoke continuity with established European wine traditions while simultaneously promoting innovative disease-resistant varieties. These observations illustrate that horticultural and viticultural nomenclature represents an interaction between linguistic creativity, cultural symbolism, and market-oriented communication.

The corpus-based analysis complements the qualitative interpretation by demonstrating systematic regional variation in the use of selected cultivar names throughout the English-speaking world. The predominance of positive evaluative adjectives accompanying commercially successful cultivars further supports the argument that naming practices contribute to the construction of favourable consumer expectations and reinforce the marketing function of cultivar nomenclature.

The study has several limitations. The qualitative analysis is based on a deliberately selected sample of commercially significant fruit and grape cultivars rather than an exhaustive inventory of horticultural nomenclature. Furthermore, although the qualitative discussion incorporates both English and German naming practices, the corpus analysis is limited to English-language data provided by the GloWbE corpus. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as representative of the analysed material rather than universally applicable to all horticultural traditions or languages.

Despite these limitations, the study offers practical implications for several fields. The findings contribute to research in onomastics, specialised terminology, ethnolinguistics, and agricultural communication by demonstrating how cultivar names function as linguistic, cultural, and commercial resources simultaneously. The results may also be relevant for plant breeders, horticultural organisations, and agricultural marketers seeking to develop cultivar names that effectively communicate desirable sensory qualities, cultural associations, and product identity across different linguistic and cultural contexts.

Future research may extend the present approach by incorporating larger multilingual corpora, additional horticultural species, and experimental investigations of consumer perception. Comparative studies involving other European languages, as well as psycholinguistic and sensory research, may further clarify how cultivar names influence expectations, product evaluation, and purchasing behaviour across different cultural communities.

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