



## A Close Look: Cultivating Plant Observation Skills

**Prep time:** 15 to 30 minutes

**Activity Time:** 45 minutes

**Guiding Question:** How might familiarity with botany terminology improve our observations and descriptions of plant characteristics?

### Materials:

- Collected one vascular plant sample per participant or ask participants to collect and bring a sample. The samples can be from any indoor or outdoor plant; herbaceous or woody plant; annuals or perennials; or another type. Do not collect materials that are poisonous to touch. Place each plant sample in its own paper or plastic bag that cannot be seen through.
- Gather paper and pencils for sketching.
- Copy Cornell fact sheet: **Botany Language Basics for Plant Identification** (available at [gardening.cornell.edu/polycultures](http://gardening.cornell.edu/polycultures) in Identify) and/or other resources that provides terminology for plant characteristics.

### Activity:

1. Given each participant a bagged plant sample. Instruct them to keep what is in their bag secret as they find a partner in the room (preferably someone they do not know).
2. Partners take turns using sight, smell and touch to share the characteristics of the plant hidden in their bag while the other sketches an image/diagram based on the verbal description. The sketcher can keep the picture private or share with describer in further clarification discussion. Each partner takes no more than 3 to 5 minutes to describe plant material. Once complete participants continue to keep plant material secret.

**Note:** The goal is not to identify the plant. It is to observe characteristics and describe those clearly enough that another can create a sketch without looking at the plant.

3. Partners consider how each might revise their plant characteristic descriptions and sketches after reviewing **Botany Language Basics** and other terminology resource provided.
4. As a whole group consider how participants' plant descriptions and sketches changed when provided the added terminology resources. How familiar are the botany terms? How was having a shared terminology language valuable? In addition to observing plant feature what other observations and information can aid understanding the type of plant, what it needs to thrive and possibly its specific identity? Consider creating collections of plant families that may include pressed material, sketches and/or pictures.

Learn more: [www.gardening.cornell.edu](http://www.gardening.cornell.edu)

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