

Botanical Background

All Lotuses are not *Nelumbos*

Throughout mythology and history the words describing waterlilies and lotuses have been used interchangeably. This is still the case in many foreign languages, where the words “waterlily” and “lotus” can mean either *Nymphaea* or *Nelumbo*, or both. The most common aquatic confusions are the “Blue Lotus” from Ancient Egypt that refers to the blue waterlily, *Nymphaea caerulea*; the “Egyptian Lotus” that is *Nymphaea lotus*, a white night bloomer; and the subgenus of *Nymphaea* called *Lotos*. The precise use of lotus for aquatic plants designates the *Nelumbo* family, which includes two species and many hundreds of cultivars.

To make matters even more confusing there are several terrestrial plants called lotus. They include *Lotus corniculatus*, the birdsfoot trefoil; *Lotus*, a genus of the pea family; and *Ziziphus lotus*, a small tree with fruit made into wine that ancient Greeks believed to cause forgetfulness and serenity. Understandably, numerous articles have been written about the confusion of the plant name lotus. To make things perfectly clear, in this booklet lotus means *Nelumbo*.

Relationship of Lotuses to Waterlilies

There are obvious visual differences between *Nymphaea* and *Nelumbo*: the leaf shape, seed pod formation, and overall stature. But some taxonomists had previously classified lotus as a waterlily, stirring up quite a bit of controversy. Recent DNA testing has supported that *Nelumbo* be placed in its own family, separate from *Nymphaeaceae*.

The taxonomy for lotus is:

Order	<i>Nymphaeales</i>
Family	<i>Nelumbonaceae</i>
Genus	<i>Nelumbo</i> Adans.
Species	<i>Nelumbo lutea</i> Willd.
Species	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i> Gaertn.
Cultivar example	<i>Nelumbo</i> ‘Chawan Basu’