

What does the word herbarium mean?

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You already know that the term Herbarium = a place wherein plant specimens are stored/housed.

The term “herbarium” is a Latin compound term consisting of: **Herba + arium**.

Herba = herb, grass, plant. **Arium** = place, possession, connection.

In old Latin, it was “**Forbea**” (= grass, etc.)

The term “**herba**” is a noun, whereas “**-arium**” is a suffix. As you know, a suffix term cannot stand alone.

Every word has a stem and case ending; the latter denotes the gender. In “**herba**”, the ending “**-a**” is the case ending denoting feminine gender. To find the stem of a word, one needs to find the genitive form of the relevant word.

For “**-a**” ending names, the genitive form (= possessive noun) has the ending “**ae**”.

For “herba”, the genitive form is: **herbae** (= herb’s or of the herb).

In **herbae**, the stem is “herb” and the genitive ending is “**-ae**”.

While making a compound word, we use the stem of the first word and the entire 2nd term. If the 2nd term starts with a consonant, we add the connective vowel “**i**” (for Latin words) between the stem of the first word and the 2nd term.

In this case, “**arium**” starts with a vowel. Therefore, NO connecting vowel is needed.

Herb (stem of herba) + **arium** (suffix) = herbarium

The Latin term “**herba**”, which originally meant for grass and other green herbaceous plants, is believed to be of Sanskrit in origin.

Many 1000s of years ago, when Indian people were nomadic in nature and moved from place to place looking for green pasture, they used the term “**bhar**” (= nourish). The “**bhar**” eventually got passed on to Greek and Latin, and became: **Herba**.

From a Latin Dictionary (Lewis & Short, 1879):

Herb: Herba (new Latin), *Forb-**ea*** (old Latin), *bhar-* (Sanskrit root, to nourish), grass, green stalks