

The Word Lover's Miscellany

At Chambers, words are our passion, and we know that people who use our dictionary share this love of words. In this Miscellany, we have selected and brought together lists of quaint, poetic, and appealing (and sometimes not so appealing) words for you to enjoy, as well effective words for you to use, in both writing and speech.

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43 words with pleasing sounds

Some words are appealing because they have a particularly pleasing combination of sounds, even if their meaning may not be quite so pleasant! Many of these musical words originate in other languages or are from the many and varied dialects of English, demonstrating what a rich language English is (and always has been).

bobolink a North American songbird
clamjamphrie rubbish; nonsense (*Scots*)
crinkum-crankum something that is full of intricate twists and turns (*dialect*)
discombobulate to disconcert, upset
dumbledore the bumblebee (*dialect*)
ferntickle a freckle (*dialect*)
glimmer-gowk an owl (*dialect*)
goluptious delicious, voluptuous
hornswoggle to trick, deceive
humdudgeon low spirits (*dialect*)
iddy-umpty Morse code (*military slang*)
impossible incapable of co-existing
jippi-jappa a palm-like tree of tropical America
kinnikinick a mixture used by Native Americans as a substitute for tobacco
Lob-lie-by-the-fire a brownie who may secretly help with chores
mulligrubs colic; sulkiness
mumpsimus a view or opinion stubbornly held
nipperty-tipperty finical; mincing (*Scots*)
obumbrate to overshadow
pilliwinks an instrument of torture for crushing the fingers
popjoy to amuse oneself
sabretache a flat bag slung from a cavalry officer's sword-belt
scroddled (of pottery) made of clay scraps of different colours
sharawaggi the use of irregularity or incongruity for deliberate, artful effect
slubberdegullion a dirty, slovenly person
snickersee a large knife for fighting
sockdologer a conclusive argument; a hard or decisive blow
squabash to crush, smash, defeat
suaveolent fragrant
syzygy conjunction or opposition
thunder-plump a heavy fall of rain in a thunderstorm
tintinnabulation bell-ringing
tokoloshe (in Bantu folklore) a dwarflike creature with supernatural powers
tosticated befuddled; perplexed (*dialect*)
tucotuco a South American rodent
tuftaffety taffeta with tufted pile
umami a savoury, satisfying taste
unguligrade walking on hoofs
vug a Cornish miner's name for a cavity in a rock
wag-at-the-wa' a hanging clock with exposed pendulum and weights (*Scots*)
williwaw a gust of cold wind blowing seawards from a mountainous coast
woubit a hairy caterpillar
zoozoo the wood pigeon (*dialect*)

50 wonderful collective nouns

Here are some of the most evocative collective nouns which have been coined for animals and birds. We think that these are guaranteed to stir the imagination.

an ambush of tigers	a knot of toads
an aurora of polar bears	a labour of moles
a barren of mules	a leap of leopards
a bask of crocodiles	a mischief of mice
a bellowing of bullfinches	a murder of crows
a bloat of hippopotamus	a murmuration of starlings
a building of rooks	an obstinacy of buffalo
a bury of rabbits	an ostentation of peacocks
a busyness of ferrets	a pandemonium of parrots
a cackle of hyenas	a parliament or stare of owls
a clew of worms	a piteousness of doves
a clowder or glaring of cats	a prickle of hedgehogs or porcupines
a coalition of cheetahs	a rumba of rattlesnakes
a congregation of plovers	a shrewdness of apes
a convocation of eagles	a skulk of foxes
a cowardice of curs	a sloth of bears
a descent of woodpeckers	a sneak of weasels
a destruction of wildcats	a surfeit of skunks
an escargatoire of snails	an ugly of walruses
an exaltation of larks	an unkindness of ravens
a gaggle of geese	a whoop of gorillas
a glint or troubling of goldfish	a wilderness of monkeys
an implausibility of gnus	a zeal of zebras
a kaleidoscope of butterflies	

43 odd idioms

The Chambers Dictionary includes a range of arresting and amusing idiomatic phrases – here are some of the best.

- a person from Porlock** someone who interrupts at an awkward moment
- bring one's hogs to a fine market** to make a complete mess of something
- broach the admiral** to steal some liquor from a cask in transit or in store
- burn the water** to spear salmon by torchlight (*Scots*)
- cop it sweet** to accept punishment without complaint (*Australian*)
- cry roast meat** to publish one's good luck foolishly (*archaic*)
- cry stinking fish** to decry one's own goods
- dodge the column** to evade one's duties
- dree one's weird** to undergo one's destiny (*Scots*)
- dust someone's jacket** to beat someone (*old*)
- get the bulge on someone** to get a decided advantage over someone (*old*)
- get the mitten** to be dismissed, especially as a suitor (*obsolete*)
- give leg bail** to run for it
- give someone his kale through the reek** to reprimand someone severely (*Scots*)
- go commando** to forgo the use of underpants
- hand someone a lemon** to swindle someone
- have a crow to pluck with** to have something to settle with someone

38 insults

Some of the most evocative words in the dictionary, and in English in general, are the more insulting ones. Some are very old, some have been coined more recently. Whether you choose to use a modern term or resurrect an old one, do so with care!

- apple-knocker** a coarse or dull-witted person (*North American*)
bed-swerver a person false to their marriage vow (*Shakespeare*)
blatherskite a garrulous talker of nonsense (*dialect*)
bunny-hugger an animal lover
candle-waster someone who studies late (*old*)
chawbacon a country person
criticaster a petty critic
desk-jockey a clerical worker
devil-dodger someone who attends churches of various kinds, to be on the safe side
doddypoll a blockhead
face-ache an ugly or disagreeable person
fizgig a giddy or flirtatious girl
gawpus a silly person
gerund-grinder a pedantic teacher
grammaticaster a piddling grammarian
hen-hussy a man who meddles with women's affairs
horse-godmother a fat, clumsy woman (*dialect*)
humgruffin a terrible person
ink-jerker a professional author or journalist
jobernowl a stupid person
lurdan a dull, heavy, stupid or sluggish person
man-milliner a man with frivolous interests or concerns
mutton-thumper a clumsy bookbinder
nipcheese a stingy person
nudnik a tiring, dull or boring person
paper-stainer a poor author
propeller-head an obsessively studious or technologically-minded person
quidnunc an inquisitive, gossiping person
quill-driver a clerk
rantipole a wild, reckless person
scraper a fiddler
script kiddie a computer hacker with limited knowledge and skill
slip-string a rogue – someone who richly deserves hanging (*dialect*)
tatterdemalion a tattered person, a ragamuffin
triphound a newspaper reporter
two-pot screamer a person who gets drunk on a comparatively small amount of alcohol (*Australian*)
wonk a serious or studious person, especially one with an interest in a trivial or unfashionable subject
young fogey a young person who adopts old-fashioned opinions, appearance, etc

50 words to surprise you

Sometimes we have been delighted to find that a word exists for a particular concept, even when you might have thought it unnecessary to have one.

- acronymia** a craze for forming acronyms
- adespota** anonymous works
- agelast** someone who never laughs
- aglet** the tag on the end of a lace
- amphibology** a phrase or sentence that is ambiguous in its construction
- angels' share** the amount of a spirit lost in a cask through evaporation
- aristology** the art of dining
- Balmorality** enthusiasm for the superficial trappings of Scottish culture
- batology** the study of brambles
- beblubbered** disfigured by weeping
- bedizen** to dress gaudily
- callipygous** having beautiful buttocks
- deipnosophist** a person who converses learnedly at dinner
- dreikanter** a pebble faceted by windblown sand
- emunctory** relating to nose-blowing
- fipple** (in wind instruments) the plug in the mouthpiece
- flew** the pendulous upper lip of a bloodhound or similar dog
- flimp** to rob (someone) while a partner hustles
- floccinaucinihilipilification** setting at little or no value (*facetious*)
- genethliac** relating to a birthday or the casting of horoscopes
- incede** to advance majestically
- Jonah word** a particular word that is a problem for a stammerer
- kakistocracy** government by the worst
- kreng** a whale carcass after the blubber has been removed
- logomachy** contention about words or in words
- lucubration** study or composition protracted late into the night
- migraineur** a person who suffers migraines
- misocapnic** hating smoke, especially that of tobacco
- mumpsimus** a view or opinion stubbornly held
- opsimathy** learning late in life
- outfangthief** the right of judging and fining thieves pursued and brought back from outside one's own jurisdiction (*history*)
- paneity** the state of being bread
- paraph** a flourish at the end of a signature
- patzer** a poor chess-player
- perpendicular** a meal or entertainment at which the guests do not sit
- retree** slightly damaged paper
- scruto** a stage trapdoor
- sesquipedalian** tending to use cumbersome or long words
- shy-cock** a cock not readily caught
- snootful** enough alcohol to make one drunk
- snoozle** to snuggle and then sleep
- steatopygous** fat-buttocked
- sumpsimus** a correct expression used in place of one that is popularly used but is strictly incorrect
- taurobolium** the sacrifice of a bull
- thinghood** the state or fact of being a thing
- ultracrepidate** to criticize beyond the sphere of one's knowledge
- waribishi** a joined pair of chopsticks that can be split
- waveson** goods floating on the sea after a shipwreck
- wayzgoose** a printers' annual dinner or picnic
- yump** in rally-driving, to leave the ground (in one's vehicle) when going over a ridge

25 words for intriguing things

At times it is not so much the word as the concept it describes that is intriguing, and some raise a smile.

- abbot of unreason** a mock abbot in medieval revels
buttock-mail the fine formerly exacted by the church in commutation of sitting on the stool of repentance
clepsydra an instrument for measuring time by the trickling of water
dandy-horse an early bicycle without pedals, driven by kicking the ground
emerods (in the Bible) representations of haemorrhoids in gold, used as charms
flapdoodle an imaginary food said to be eaten by fools
gardyloo the old warning cry in Edinburgh before throwing slops out of the window into the street
jellygraph a former device for copying that used a plate of jelly
killfud-yoking a fireside disputation
lagerphone a percussion instrument using the tops of beer bottles
mallemaroking the carousing of sailors in icebound ships
omophagy the eating of raw flesh, especially as a religious observance
omoplatoscopy divination by observing the cracks in a burning shoulder-blade
pantophobia fear of everything
presentment of Englishry the offering of proof that a person murdered belonged to the English race, to escape the fine levied on the hundred or township for the murder of a Norman (*history*)
Ralph the imp of mischief in a printing house
shot-clog a simpleton who is only tolerated for his willingness to pay the bill
skimmington the old custom of forming a burlesque procession to ridicule an unfaithful husband or nagging wife
stool of repentance a place, especially in Scottish churches, where delinquents, especially fornicators, were exposed
sug to attempt to sell a product while purporting to be engaged in market research
taghairm (in the Scottish Highlands) divination, especially inspiration sought by lying in a bullock's hide behind a waterfall
tickly-benders a game played on thin ice that bends underfoot
Tom Tiddler's ground a place where wealth is to be had for the picking up
verbicide destroying the meaning of a word
zelatrix a nun whose duty is to keep watch on the behaviour of the younger nuns in the convent, or on that of the mother superior

100 words to impress

Using very formal or technical words doesn't really impress your listeners – it just bamboozles them. There are other, wonderfully succinct words that are common enough to be widely understood, and if you can use these words appropriately, they will add colour and conviction to your expression.

- abstruse** difficult to understand
alacrity a willingness or eagerness to act quickly
apposite particularly appropriate under the circumstances or for the purpose
atavistic inherited from our earliest human ancestors; primitive
axiomatic so obviously true that it does not need to be proved or explained
Byzantine intricate, tortuous
cataclysmic revolutionary; catastrophic
caveat a warning that something is only true within certain limitations
circumspect cautious; prudent
circumvent to get round, outwit, avoid
clandestine concealed, done in secret
cognizant of aware of or knowing all about something
contiguous touching; adjoining
contumacious opposing lawful authority with contempt; obstinate
contumely scornful insolence
corollary a natural or obvious consequence or result of something
coruscating (of wit) sparkling, flashing
deleterious harmful, damaging, or destructive
detritus accumulated debris
dilatory slow to act
draconian extremely severe
effulgent shining
effusive showing positive feelings in an open way
egregious exceptionally and shockingly bad
empirical known through practical experience
endemic regularly found among a particular people or in a particular district
ephemeral short-lived or fleeting
eschew to shun; to abstain from
esoteric understood only by a few people who have the necessary knowledge
exculpate to absolve; to vindicate
execrable appallingly bad
expedient profitable or convenient rather than fair or just
expedite to hasten, speed up
extirpate destroy or remove completely
febrile feverish
foment to foster; to encourage or provoke
fulminate to issue decrees with violence or threats
funereal dismal; mournful
hegemony leadership; predominant influence
heterogeneous composed of people or things that are not related to one another
heuristic serving or leading to find out
hiatus a break in something that should be continuous
homogeneous composed of people or things that are related to one another
hubris over-confidence; arrogance that brings about disaster
iconoclastic opposed to or attacking traditional beliefs or customs
imprimatur approval or permission
incipient just beginning to happen
inculcate to instil with frequent repetitions
insidious developing gradually and imperceptibly
intractable impossible to solve, cure or deal with
invidious likely to cause envy, resentment or indignation
labyrinthine full of intricate twists and turns
laconic using very few words
loquacious talkative
mercurial tending to change suddenly and unpredictably
meretricious superficially attractive but of no real value or merit; insincere
mordant sarcastic or critical in a clever, but sometimes cruel way
nebulous vague, not clearly defined or developed

37 weasel words

Some words seem intended to befuddle us. These words, which range from slightly evasive to brazenly euphemistic, are meant to make the truth a bit more palatable.

- asymmetric warfare** conflict between two sides with significantly different military resources
- benign neglect** ignoring a pressing problem
- blue-on-blue** involving accidental firing on one's allies in a military situation
- challenge** a problem, a difficulty
- change management** directing a change in a company, especially in making numerous people redundant
- collateral damage** civilian casualties or damage to non-military targets
- consolidation** collating all one's debts to create one massive one
- correctional facility** a prison
- deaccession** selling off library books, works of art, etc
- deleveraging** paying back borrowed money
- disadvantaged** poor, in poverty
- disinformation** lying
- downsize** the process whereby a company makes itself smaller, especially by means of redundancies
- efficiencies** cutbacks
- enhanced (or alternative) interrogation** interrogation using severe coercive techniques
- ethnic cleansing** genocide
- extraordinary rendition** the covert transporting of individuals, especially terrorist suspects, to undisclosed destinations for the purpose of interrogation
- fee** a fine
- friendly fire** accidental firing upon one's allies rather than one's enemies
- headcount reduction** making people redundant
- investment opportunity** something that someone would like you to pay for
- leveraging** borrowing money
- liberate** conquer
- liquidity shortfall** lack of funds
- misspoke** said something controversial that you later regretted
- move forward** to leave something unsavoury behind and hope everyone forgets about it
- ownership of** responsibility for
- personal development** making yourself more useful to the company you work for
- pre-emptive self-defence** attack
- re-engineering** adapting (an organization), usually involving making people redundant
- regime change** the forced deposition of a ruler
- restructuring** adapting (an organization), usually involving making people redundant
- rightsize** reducing (an organization) to an appropriate size, usually involving making people redundant
- streamlining** attempting to make (an organization) more efficient, usually involving making people redundant
- underprivileged** poor, in poverty
- unlawful enemy combatant** a terrorist, therefore subject to the conventional rights of prisoners of war
- wrong-site surgery** surgery on the wrong part of someone's body

25 clichéd expressions

Many phrases have been so overused that they have become clichés. Here are some of our favourite examples, with suggestions for plain English expressions to use instead.

at the end of the day
ultimately; in the end

at this moment in time
now; at the moment

can of worms
complex problem; difficult situation;
unpredictable situation

cause a headache
cause a problem; cause a difficulty

come to terms with
cope with; accept

emotional rollercoaster
difficult/trying/emotional experience

hold one's hands up
admit/take responsibility

in a very real sense
This can be omitted without loss of meaning.

... is the new ...
... has become fashionable, etc

move the goalposts
change the conditions/requirements

not rocket science
simple; easy; requiring little intelligence

outpouring of grief
expression of grief

prodigious talent
exceptional ability; extraordinary talent

push the envelope
push the boundaries; challenge the limits

score an own goal
make a mistake; make a move to one's own disadvantage

set out one's stall
make one's aims/intentions clear

sing from the same hymn sheet
agree; be in agreement

step up to the plate
put oneself forward; take on responsibility

take one's eye off the ball
lose focus; lose sight of one's priorities;
become distracted from one's aims

the bottom line
what is most important

the complete package
have all the necessary talents

the fact of the matter
the fact; the truth; the reality

think outside the box
disregard conventional thinking

tick all the boxes
fulfil the requirements

years young
years old (or simply state the person's age)

27 cringeworthy words

There are some fashionable words that are used so often, mainly by politicians and people in the media, that it can make us cringe to hear them. Here are some that make us flinch.

- 110%** meaning 'very much'
- actually** used unnecessarily to mean 'in fact'
- basically** used unnecessarily to mean 'really'
- closure** meaning resolution, acceptance
- dynamic** as a noun referring to the relationship between things
- factor** meaning a component, element, part, feature
- hard-hitting** used to describe anything frankly critical
- individual** as a noun meaning 'a person'
- joined-up** co-ordinated; organized
- journey** meaning a set of personal experiences, progress
- on-message/off-message** following/not following an accepted policy or view
- quality** meaning good, excellent
- quantum leap** an advance
- quasi-** combined with anything to mean 'in appearance only'
- roadmap** a plan
- scenario** meaning any imagined or projected situation
- sea change** a big change
- slam** as a verb meaning 'criticize'
- solutions** any services or products a company sells
- step change** a fundamental change
- time bomb** referring to anything that might have a negative future effect
- tragedy** referring to a sad or shocking event
- transparency** meaning openness, honesty
- tsar** referring to an expert, authority or adviser
- veritable** intensifier used for anything at all
- vision** referring to one's intention or hope
- witch-hunt** meaning any persecution

30 word gripes

Some of us are sticklers for correct usage and get annoyed by words being used in ways we would deem to be imprecise or loose. Here are some examples.

To **acquiesce in** something is to agree to it without opposition. Now we might hear **acquiesce to**.

If something is **actionable**, it gives grounds for legal action. In the business world, it has come to mean 'able to be carried out' or 'doable'.

To **aggravate** something is to make it more troublesome or worse, but **aggravate** is often used to mean 'to irritate or annoy'.

To **anticipate** something is to realize or deal with it in advance, but is often used to mean 'to expect'.

An **auspicious** occasion has good auspices or omens of success; it is not just 'grand' or 'special'.

A **consensus** is an agreement of opinion, rather than just a trend in opinion. Its meaning also makes it unnecessary to speak of a 'consensus of opinion'.

100 words to watch

Here is a selection of 100 words that did not quite make it into the pages of *The Chambers Dictionary* this time round. Many reflect our 21st century preoccupations. We will be keeping an eye on them and, who knows, some may appear in future editions.

ambush marketing attaching your product to a major sporting event, etc without paying a sponsorship fee

apronym or **apronym** a personal name that influences or reflects some aspect of that person's life, for example Mr Read, who is a librarian

big society a policy of civic engagement pursued by the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government, with individuals actively involved in the provision of facilities, services, etc, with minimal government involvement

bossnapping a form of industrial action whereby workers detain managers in the workplace

broken society the notion of a society characterized by unemployment, crime, substance abuse, etc

carrotmob an organized gathering of people at an environmentally-friendly business in order to demonstrate support by buying its products

celesbian a celebrity who is, or is reputed to be, a lesbian

clickjacking tricking a Web user into clicking on links disguised as innocuous buttons or options

competitive commuting racing another cyclist while commuting to or from work on a bicycle

cookprint the amount of energy and other resources used in preparing meals

cosplay the practice, especially in Japan, of dressing up as a fictional character

couch hopping or **couch surfing** moving between people's homes in order to receive temporary, free accommodation

crunch creep social and economic trends suggested to be consequences of a credit crunch, for example a decline in the divorce rate because couples cannot pay for the divorce process

cyber-Cyrano a person who writes your online dating profile for you to show you in the best possible light

data exhaust the digitally traceable actions and preferences that people generate when using the Internet

data smog electronic information which, by its sheer volume, confuses people and increases stress

daycation a holiday for a day, a daytrip

dead zone a place with no mobile phone signal

digital native a person who does not remember a time when computer use was not widespread

distracted driving driving while texting, etc

drunkorexia limiting one's food intake to allow for calories consumed in alcoholic drinks

dumbsizing making a business or operation so small that it cannot function properly

dumbphone a mobile phone that does not have the technological features of a smartphone

- earworm** a song or passage from a song that keeps repeating in one's head
- eco-anxiety** anxiety caused by concerns about the state of the environment
- eco-bling** household gadgets marketed as eco-friendly but which in reality do not save much energy
- eco-driving** driving in a manner that minimizes fuel consumption and exhaust emissions
- ecotarian** someone who eats only food that is in season, and which is sustainably and locally produced
- edupunk** an educational movement favouring non-traditional, high-tech teaching methods
- eggcorn** a substitution of a correct word or phrase for an erroneous or invented one which sounds similar and has a semantic connection (for example, *eardrop* for *eavesdrop*)
- exergaming** video games that involve physical activity and constitute a form of exercise
- fauxmance** a pretended romantic relationship between two celebrities used to generate media interest
- first preventer** law enforcement or intelligence personnel who are in the most advantageous position to prevent a terrorist attack
- flash crash** an extremely rapid stock market decline
- foodoir** a memoir that includes recipes or is focused on food, meals, or cooking
- framily** a group of close friends
- freemium** of a business model that gives basic services free, but charges for special features
- frenemy** a person who pretends to be a friend but is actually an enemy
- funemployment** the active enjoyment of one's free time while unemployed
- funt** (of a person) financially untouchable
- gastrosexual** a person, especially a man, who uses his culinary skills to impress potential partners
- ghost estate** (in Ireland) an unfinished and unoccupied housing estate, the construction of which started during the period of economic growth, and stopped when the economy fell into decline
- glamping** camping using upmarket sites, facilities, etc, considered more glamorous than traditional camping
- green anarchy** a form of anarchism driven by environmental concerns
- hacktivist** someone who hacks into computer systems as a form of protest
- hyperlocal** (of news, etc) relating to a very specific and often small community or geographical area
- hypermiling** driving using techniques that maximize a vehicle's fuel economy
- infomediary** a person who, or company that, gathers information about the preferences of online consumers in order to sell it to companies that retail on the Web
- intexticated** distracted while driving because one is sending a text message
- jargonaut** someone who uses jargon excessively
- jihobbyist** someone who is sympathetic to radical Islam, but who is not a member of a radical group