

Common Name: **Woad**

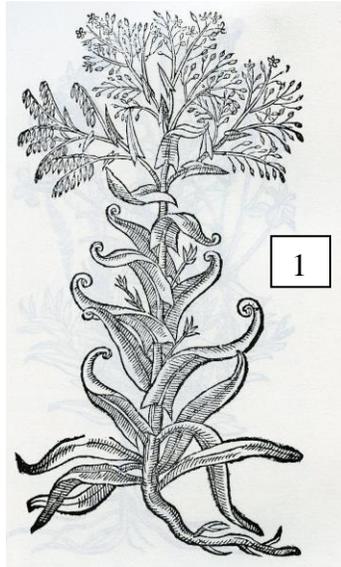
Genus: *Isatis*

Species: *tinctoria*

Family: Brassicaceae

AKA: Woade, Wade, Guado

Historical Uses:



Major crop in the Middle Ages, esp. in France, where the plant was grown for its dye paste. Julius Caesar and Pliny both described how the Britons painted their bodies blue with woad. Smell from the fermentation process was so foul that Queen Elizabeth I banned the process within 5 miles of any of her palaces (1).

Medical: “Let whoever suffers from any sort of palsy, no matter how strong, cook woad vigorously in water, strain this through a piece of cloth, and throw out the herbs.



New leaves

Then place vulture fat and half as much deer tallow in that water, cook all this together, and make an ointment. Let the person anoint himself or herself with this often; the palsy will cease.” (2)

Applications of the leaves ease stomach troubles, cause sweating, stops urine from burning and purge the viscera. Seeds said to stop hiccups. (3)

“A decoction of woade drunketh is goode for such as have any stoppings or hardnesse in the milt or spleene, and is also good for wounds or ulcers in bodies of a strong constitution, as of country people, and such as are accustomed to great labour and hard course fare.” (4)



Household: Blue dye color develops after fermentation of the leaves.

“It serveth well to dye and colour cloath, profitable to somefew, and hurtfull to many”.(5)



Mature leaves on stalk

Religious: Women in pre-Christian Britain would dye their bodies with this plant for some religious observances.

Folklore/Astrology: It is a plant of Saturn and is cold and dry.

Contemporary Uses:

Parts used: Leaves and roots. Leaves picked in summer. Roots lifted in autumn and dried.

Medicinal: “A bitter, chilling herb that lowers fever and reduces inflammation. It controls a wide range of pathogenic organisms, including viruses, and reputedly has anti-cancer effects. Used internally for meningitis, encephalitis, mumps, influenza, erysipelas, heat rash, sore throat, abscesses, and swellings.” (6)

Economic: Can be used as a dye however mostly superseded by Indigo in the 1630’s. (7)

Area of Origin: Central and southern Europe into Asia

Physical description: Rosette of lanceolate leaves. Flower stalks produce branched panicles with flowers then seed pods.

Plant in flower



Plant type: Biennial or short lived perennial.

Height: 24”-48”

Flower color: Numerous small yellow 4-petaled flowers.

Flowering period: Summer

Soil type/ requirements: Rich, well-drained neutral to alkaline.

Hardiness zone: USDA 3-8

Sun requirements: Full sun

Propagation: By seed sown in autumn or spring. Often self-seeds

Sources:

1. Bown, p. 244-245
2. Von Bingen, p.171
3. Anderson, p. 156
4. Gerard, p. 490-491
5. Ibid
6. Bown, p. 244-245
7. Ibid

Illustrations/Images:

1. Gerard 1633
2. PSUMG 2012
3. PSUMG 2011
4. PSUMG 2011
5. PSUMG 2011