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### *Dioscorea*

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*Dioscorea* comemorates a Cilician Greek physician, pharmacologist and botanist, Pedanius Dioscorides (c. 40-c. 90) who travelled through the ancient Roman and Greek spheres of influence, not least as an army doctor, which offered him the opportunity to study plants. He is especially remembered for his five volume *De Materia Medica* (which was used until the 1600s). It was the forerunner of a modern pharmacopoeia (listing drugs and their collection and preparation). He embraced about 600 plants (about 100 of which were new to his peers) and offered limited plant description and, apart from medicinal qualities and about 1000 treatments, also included some of the Dacian and Thracian common names of plants which would otherwise have been lost for all time. Arab scholars translated and preserved the volumes until about 10<sup>th</sup> Century when they were translated into Latin. There have been many editions (with various additions) and the oldest known illustrated manuscripts date back to about 5<sup>th</sup> Century. One of the most famous of these that authorities draw attention to is known as the *Vienna Dioscurides*.

Species in this genus have some potentially poisonous qualities.

Archaeologists have found yam remains that have been radio-carbon-dated to about 8000 BC in south-eastern Asia. One other general point of interest is that in previously forested Himalayan areas yams are on the verge of extinction in the wild because of over-harvesting from the desire to harness their contraceptive qualities.