

Genista tinctoria

[Synonyms : *Cytisus virgatus*, *Genista alpestris*, *Genista anxantica*, *Genista depressa*, *Genista elatior*, *Genista humilior*, *Genista humilis*, *Genista hungarica*, *Genista ovata*, *Genista patula*, *Genista polygalaefolia*, *Genista sibirica*, *Genista virgata*, *Spartium tinctorium*]

DYER'S GREENWEED is a prostrate deciduous shrub. Native to western Asia and to Europe (including Britain), it has small pea-like, golden yellow flowers.

It is also known as Alleluia, *Banadlos* (Welsh), Base broom, Brummel, Dyer's broom, Dyer's greenwood, Dyer's weed, Dyer's whin, Dyeweed, *Färberginster* (German), *Färgginst* (Swedish), Furze, *Genêt des teinturiers* (French), *Genisto tinktura* (Esperanto), *Ginster* (German), Green broom, Greening-weed, Greenweed, Greenwood, Kendal green, *Kručinka barviřská* (Czech), *Kručinka farbiarska* (Slovak), Madeira broom, *Melynog y Waun* (Welsh), Salem wood-wax, Sarrat, She-broom, Waxen woad, Whin, Woadmesh, Woadwax, Woad waxen, Woadwex, Woadwise, Woodas, Woodwash, Woodwax, Wood waxen, and Yellow: and in flower language is said to be a symbol of anger.

When visited by an insect the flowers burst open to release their pollen.

Warning – the seeds especially (which can have a purgative effect) must not be taken internally during pregnancy or if suffering from high blood pressure.

Tinctoria is derived from Latin *tinctus* (dyed, stained, tinged) meaning 'used in dyeing'.

It is closely related to broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) which used to be called 'genista' in the Middle Ages.

Dyer's greenweed has been and continues to be associated primarily with dyeing. Even today although in western Europe it is primarily the source of home craft dyes some of the Greek islands may perpetuate its use in similar fashion to their ancient ancestors. The Romans used the plant for dyeing linen, wool, cloth generally and leather. When Edward III (1312-1377) was on the English throne Flemish immigrants introduced a dyeing process that was to achieve great significance economically. The dyes obtained from dyer's greenweed and woad (*Isatis tinctoria*) were combined to yield the famous Kendal green. In England poor people used to collect this plant and sell it to the dyers, particularly around Kendal in the north of England and in East Anglia. To the west in Gloucestershire the harvesters were known as 'woodwaxers' and they sold the plant (root and all) by weight. The reward would have been small and it is understood that *Journal of a Naturalist* by J.L. Knapp which was published in 1829 notes that the weight was often 'enhanced' with water.

It is said to have been introduced to the United States by John Endecott (c. 1588-1665) who became Governor of Salem in Massachusetts.

Medicinally, herbalists used to recommend the powdered seeds as a purgative, and a decoction of the plant was used to treat fluid retention, gout and rheumatism. In the Ukraine they have used the decoction to treat hydrophobia. Today dyer's greenweed is used in homoeopathic treatments.