

Tradescantia

Commelinaceae

Tradescantia commemorates an English father and his son, John Tradescant the Elder and John Tradescant the Younger.

An English naturalist, plant collector and gardener, John Tradescant the Elder (c.1570-1638), travelled to the Low Countries, France, Arctic Russia and Algiers collecting plants from the wild and/or buying plants. He was head gardener to the Earl of Salisbury, Robert Cecil (c.1563-1612), and briefly his successor, at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire. While there he was sent to the Low Countries (Dutch/Belgian region) and Paris to bring back trees, vines and bulbs. In 1615 he moved to Canterbury to Edward Wotton, 1st Baron Wotton of Marley (1548-c.1625) and was especially noticed there for his cultivation of exotic species. In 1618 he accompanied a diplomatic party to Archangel (now Arkhangel'sk). This gave him the opportunity to explore and observe the surrounding Russian coastal flora and fauna, particularly to the west, where he collected plants and other specimens of natural history. He also explored a small Russian island opposite the Nikolo-Karelsky Monastery to the west of Archangel where he is said to have discovered a rose which he christened *Rosa muscovita*. In 1620/1621 Tradescant joined the English fleet sent to suppress the corsairs (Barbary pirates out of ports on the North African coast) who were harrasing shipping in the western Mediterranean, including English vessels. Whenever possible he went ashore and collected many plants (particularly around Algiers). In 1623 he became gardener at New Hall in Essex to the 1st Duke of Buckingham, George Villiers (1592-1628) and travelled first, again to the Low Countries to buy plants on Villiers' behalf and then accompanied Villiers (as a member of his entourage) twice to France. In 1628 he moved into The Ark, a house in Lambeth (London) with two or three acres, where he nurtured plants from all over the world. The Ark also became the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* (the first English public museum) in which Tradescant's collections of stuffed animals, minerals, medals, coins and other artefacts went on display towards the end of his life. In 1630 he was appointed King's Keeper at Oatlands Palace (at Weybridge in Surrey, now an hotel) by King Charles I (1600-1649) and in 1637 became Director/Curator of the Oxford Physic Garden.

An English botanist, traveller and gardener, John Tradescant the Younger (1608-1662), explored Virginia in North America hunting for plants there. In 1637 he made his first Virginian trip returning with several hundred plants – and in 1638 on the death of his father he succeeded him as Keeper at Oatlands Palace (a post he would lose when the Palace was sold for demolition in 1650). His second and shorter Virginian visit in 1642 was followed in due time by a third. All the while he developed and maintained his home botanical garden at Lambeth, as well as the *Musaeum Tradescantianum* which remained open to the public and to which he added a relative few 'rarities and curiosities'. In 1656 he published a museum catalogue (reprinted a few years later) including a list of plant species grown which indicated a higher volume of medicinal and food plants than in his father's lifetime. The English antiquary and politician, Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) encouraged and assisted John Tradescant in this publication. Tradescant made several wills in which he left the Museum collection variously to Ashmole (unbeknown to him at the time), to the king, and to Oxford and Cambridge Universities respectively. At

Tradescant's death this caused much confusion and distress involving lawyers who eventually supported the Ashmole claim. Ashmole bought the neighbouring property to The Ark in 1674 and in 1678 he took full control of the collection of artefacts, books and papers which he donated to Oxford University as the basis for the Ashmolean Museum which was inaugurated in 1683. John Tradescant the Younger was a freeman of The Worshipful Company of Gardeners.