



WOAD

Latin: *Isatis tinctoria*

Welsh: Llyisiau'r Lliw

Woad, a plant native to much of Europe, is now very rarely found growing wild in Britain. It was cultivated as a source of blue dye for thousands of years.

Woad is named by Abbot Aelfric of Eynsham in 995 in *The Glossary to Grammatica Latino-Saxonica* (a Latin/Anglo Saxon vocabulary).

The Ancient Britons, notably the Picts and the Icene tribe (of Boadicea fame!), used Woad to colour their faces and their bodies blue before going into battle, their appearance guaranteed to terrify their enemy. And this blue 'war paint' would also have helped to heal wounds.

Both the ancient Greeks and the Romans recognised that an application of Woad helped to stem bleeding, Dioscorides describing it as an excellent styptic.

Woad processing was long associated with East Anglia. In the late C13th and C14th Norwich became a centre of a flourishing trade with foreign Woad merchants. In the C16th Woad growing was restricted by government to prevent over production of this lucrative crop.

Woad dye was produced by a fermentation of crushed and dried leaves, a process which resulted in a very offensive smell!

Woad was superseded as a commercial dye by Asian indigo (*Indigofera tinctoria*) and by synthetic dyes in the C20th, but is still favoured by home spinners & dyers.

Woad combined with **Dyer's Greenweed** (*Genista tinctoria*) produces a green dye.

Dyer's Greenweed, also known as Dyer's Broom, is found throughout Northern Europe. The Romans wove the yellow flowers of the plant into chaplets. Dyer's Greenweed was planted near beehives to attract the bees and to encourage them to settle. The flowering tops of the plant produce a yellow dye