

The dyer's vats



It is not easy to locate the reasons for green's depreciation in the late Middle Ages. They are probably multiple. One material cause, however, can be put forward: the difficulty of dyeing in green. What was possible to do in the feudal period no longer seemed so in the late medieval period. Dyeing had become a large-scale industrial enterprise and increasingly restrictive professional regulations hindered the production of certain colors. That was the case with green, which had formerly been obtained quite easily: in villages, with inexpensive plant colorants that produced dull, nonresistant tones; in towns, by immersing fabrics first in a vat of blue and then in a vat of yellow, a mixing technique unknown or unpopular with the Romans but common among the Germans and that remained in use in the West until the feudal period. By the end of the Middle Ages, everything had changed. Not only did customers demand solid, pure, luminous colors, but also in the cloth industry in large towns the dyeing trades were reorganized in such a way that mixing blue and yellow to make green was henceforth forbidden.

MEDICINAL PLANTS

Plant guides and herbaria became numerous in the late Middle Ages. Unlike bestiaries, which focused on the symbolism of animals, they were less concerned with the meaning of plants than with their medicinal, culinary, or tinctorial properties. Here we see a few leading plants in the pharmacopoeia: celandine, arum, and solanum (left); hemp, cabbage, and cardoon (right).

Miniature from *Livre des simples médecines*, illuminated by Robinet Testard, early 16th century. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. fr. 12322, fol. 138 v° and 171.

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