Dye Plant of the Month: Dyer’s Broom, Dyer’s Greenweed, Woad Waxen, Low Broom  
(*Genista tinctoria* L.)

![Dyer's Broom](http://www.cherrygal.com/flowerperennialdyesbroomheirloomseeds2014-p-14592.html)

Plant Family: Fabaceae (Legume Family)

Description: Deciduous perennial shrub, up to about 2 ft, hardy in Zone 4. Leaves bright green, slender, lance-shaped, Flowers profuse, yellow, pea-like (typical of the Legume Family), often fragrant, appearing mid-summer into fall. Seed pods about 1” long.

Origin and Current Range: Native to Eurasia and established in Britain, Europe, eastern Canada and northeastern U.S., the state of Washington, and in a few other places around the world as well. Introduced into Massachusetts in 1645 by Governor Endicott as a dye plant.

Reproduction and Cultivation: Reproduces by seed. Seeds should be soaked overnight or scarified before planting. Should germinate in 2-3 weeks. Does well in sunny, dry, sandy locations. Allow about 4 sq. ft. per plant. Once established, thrives in its original location but does not transplant well. The plants grow slowly the first year, but should flower the second year. The plants

Dye Color and Parts Used for Dye: The entire plant including the flowers, stems and leaves, can be used. Cut fresh blooming branches during the flowering season, or cut off the entire plant and dry for use later. According to Rita Buchanan, it is not necessary to separate flowers and stems. Wool, silk and cotton, mordanted with alum, simmered briefly, give a light yellow of moderate lightfastness. Longer simmering results in deeper gold colors. Jenny Dean recommends keeping the dye bath temperature just below simmer. Dyer’s broom can also be used to dye linen and leather, and also can be used with woad or indigo to yield a green dye. Mixing with these blue dyes resulted in Lincoln green, the color worn by Robin Hood, and Kendal green, an important woolen dye.

Other Information: Fragments of dyer’s broom have been found in Viking archeological sites, suggesting the possible use of this plant for dyeing at that time. It was also used by the Romans. Chemical analyses of ancient fabrics dyed with *Genista tinctoria* are not as much researched as some colored with other dyestuffs, but a paper published in 2014 provides great detail for those interested in the chemical properties of dyes from this plant (see ref. 10 below). The plant has also been used for various medicinal purposes since ancient times.
Note to reader: Please see the following resources for significantly more details, illustrations, etc., than what I have summarized above.

References:


14. Jenny Dean’s Wild Colour blog: [Link: http://www.jennydean.co.uk/index.php/anglo-saxon-dyes-weld-and-dyers-broom/].  [Note: See this web site for photos comparing the color ranges obtained with weld and dyer’s broom.]

15. KEW Royal Botanic Gardens web site:  [Link: http://www.kew.org/support-kew/adopt-a-seed/genista-tinctoria.htm]


17. Wild Colours web site:  [Link: http://www.wildcolours.co.uk/html/greenweed.html]