

Rembert Dodoens (1518 – 1585)

Rembert Dodoens was born in 1518 in Mechelen in the Low Countries, near present-day Belgium's commercial and second largest city, Antwerp. His father was the Friesland-based personal physician of Emperor Charles V, and Rembert, too, studied medicine, gaining his licentiate at Leuven when he was 18 years old. He spent the next few years travelling through France, Germany and Italy, visiting universities and furthering his studies, and in 1574 was appointed city physician of Mechelen.

In 1574 he became court physician in Vienna to Emperor Maximilian II and then to his successor Rudolf of Austria. On his return to Mechelen he found that his property had been seized under the pretext that he had left permanently – so he did! In 1583, after several years working in Cologne and Antwerp, he accepted the chair of medicine at Leiden University, which had been founded just ten years earlier by William, Prince of Orange. The first university in the Netherlands, and one of the oldest in Europe, Leiden houses an extensive library and collection of prints and drawings, a botanical garden (started by Clusius) and the national herbarium. Rembert Dodoens was there for only two years before his death in 1585, at the age of 67.

Rembert Dodoens (Dodonaeus), Charles de l'Ecluse (Clusius, 1526–1585) and Matthias de l'Obel (Lobelius, 1538–1616) were three great plantsmen, all from the Low Countries, who dominated the field in the latter part of the 16th century. Each with his own speciality, they produced a deluge of plant books, most of them published in Antwerp by the Flemish printer Christophe Plantin (c.1520–1589). Dodoens was particularly knowledgeable about the plants of the Low Countries, always with the mindset of a physician, and his books were classed as herbals. He built upon the work of Fuchs, classifying according to pharmaceutical use and common features, and was constantly revising as new plants arrived in Western Europe.

He grew the plants, and to make his work accessible to gardeners without Latin, he wrote his *Crujide Boeck* (book of medicinal herbs) in the vernacular. Published in Antwerp in 1554, with 715 woodblock illustrations commissioned by the printer Jan van der Loe (including for the first time, the tomato and the day lily), it had repeated reprints and was later translated into Latin, French and English. Most of Dodoens' other works, including medical translations, observations and lectures, were compiled after his death.

The *Dodonaea* genus of flowering plants honours Rembert Dodoens, also known by his Latinised name Rembertus Dodonaeus, one of the foremost botanists of his day.



Dodonaea viscosa* subsp. *viscosa

The *Dodonaea* genus comprises about 68 species of shrubs or trees with alternate simple or pinnate leaves. The flowers are produced in short racemes, and the fruit is a capsule, often with two or three wings. Sixty-one species are found in Australia and the rest scattered through the tropics and subtropics, with one in New Zealand. *Dodonaea viscosa*, or akeake, is a small tree of coastal and lowland forest, extending from North Cape to Banks Peninsula and Greymouth. Thin reddish-brown bark flakes off the trunk, which reaches about 15 cm diameter. The wood is hard and was used by pre-European Māori for making weapons, and by early settlers for fashioning axe handles and mauls. The thin, pale green leaves on New Zealand plants, despite the specific name, are not obviously viscid (sticky). Petals are absent on the small, rather inconspicuous flowers, male, female or bisexual, which appear on the same or different plants in October–November. The attractive winged fruit are more obvious. A bronze-leaved form, which usually comes true from seed, is popular in gardens.