

Jean-Baptiste de la Quintinie (1624 – 1688)

Jean-Baptiste de la Quintinie (or Quintinye) was born on 1 March 1624 in Chabanais, a village in the Poitou-Charentes region of Southwest France, the second of four sons in the family of Guillaume la Quintinie, a king's councillor, and Françoise Suzanne Morand. After studying law at the Jesuit College in Poitiers, Jean-Baptiste became a court lawyer in Paris. In 1653 Jean Tambonneau, president of the general accounting office, asked him to tutor his son, Michel. Accompanying his student on a tour of Italy to introduce him to the arts, Quintinie was so inspired by the beautiful gardens and countryside that on his return he abandoned his career in law and devoted himself to horticulture.



Quintinia serrata

Quintinia serrata (Latin *serratus* 'shaped like a saw, notched, with saw-like edge') has until recently been considered three species. A variable, often dominant, sub-canopy and understory tree in lowland and mountain forest in New Zealand, it is found from Northland to northern Taranaki in the North Island, and in the South Island from Nelson to Okarito. Tāwheowheo grows up to 12 metres tall, with smooth, pale bark and alternate waxy, leathery leaves often mottled with red, brown or yellow. The leaf margins are often wavy and may be toothed. It produces 4–8 cm spikes of tiny cream male or female flowers with five spreading petals, sometimes tinted lilac-purple, in spring. Dry seed capsules with 3–5 compartments mature in summer.

He devoured ancient literature, studied contemporary theories and experimented in Tamboneau's Paris garden, making observations that revolutionised gardening, and also travelled to England to study the state of the art there. His reputation spread and he was summoned by members of the nobility to create gardens and orchards in many of the great castles. In 1660 he married Marguerite Joubert; they were to have three sons, but only one survived him. In 1661 Quintinie was appointed by finance minister Nicolas Fouquet to manage the gardens of his chateau Vaux-le-Vicomte, and after Fouquet's fall from grace he undertook other notable gardens, including the former garden of Louis XIII at Versailles.

In 1670 he visited garden designer John Evelyn at Sayes Court, Deptford, London, and reputedly declined an offer from Charles II, the "Merry Monarch", to take charge of the royal gardens there. He returned to France and entered the service of Charles II's first cousin King Louis XIV, as director of all the royal fruit and kitchen gardens, a position created especially for him. In 1678, when a larger garden was needed, he began transforming a nine-hectare marshland chosen by the king for its proximity to the chateau, and using techniques that enabled him to grow out-of-season crops, he offered the king's table a wide range of high quality food. He was rewarded with a knighthood in 1687, and died on 11 November 1688 in the house that the king had built for him in the garden at Versailles.

Jean-Baptiste de la Quintinie was a corresponding member of the Royal Society of London (co-founded by John Evelyn in 1660), but published nothing of his own during his lifetime. His son Michel, who succeeded him as director of the king's kitchen garden, published posthumously his valuable manuscript *Instruction Pour les Jardins Fruitiers et Potagers* (Paris, 1690). John Evelyn's translation as *The Compleat Gard'ner* in 1693 introduced it to a wider audience.

Today, a statue of Jean-Baptiste de la Quintinie presides over the cultivation of hundreds of varieties of fruit, vegetables and flowers in the Potager du Roi, virtually unchanged since its inception in 1678 and now open to all. In the Antipodes, *Quintinia* is a small genus of trees and shrubs found in the Philippines, New Guinea, eastern Australia and New Zealand. French botanist Alphonse de Candolle commemorated his compatriot with the name in 1830, and *Quintinia serrata*, a New Zealand endemic, was described by Allan Cunningham in 1839.