

History of Botany

History of Botany – Key Phases, Figures, and Concepts

1. Antiquity (c. 3000 BCE – 5th century CE)

Period / Region	Major Contributions	Representative Works / Figures
Ancient Egypt	Cataloguing of useful plants (medicinal, agricultural).	<i>Ebers Papyrus</i> (c. 1550 BCE) – lists >700 plant remedies.
Mesopotamia	Early herbals for pharmacology.	<i>Sumerian plant lists</i> (c. 2100 BCE).
Classical Greece	Systematic observation; first attempts to classify plants by habit and use.	Theophrastus (c. 371–287 BCE) – <i>Historia Plantarum</i> & <i>Enquiry into Herbs</i> ; introduced categories “trees”, “shrubs”, “herbs”, “vines”.
Roman Empire	Transmission and expansion of Greek knowledge; emphasis on medicinal uses.	Pliny the Elder (23–79 CE) – <i>Naturalis Historia</i> (Book 28).
India & China	Parallel herbal traditions; integration of botany with medicine.	<i>Sushruta Samhita</i> (c. 600 BCE); <i>Shennong Bencao Jing</i> (1st century CE).

Takeaway: Early botany was largely descriptive and utilitarian, focused on identification for food, medicine, and ritual.

2. Medieval & Islamic Golden Age (5th–15th centuries)

Region	Highlights
Islamic World	Synthesis of Greek, Indian, and Persian knowledge; introduction of experimental observation. • Al-Dinawari (c. 825) – <i>Kitab al-Nabat</i> (plant book). • Al-Jahiz (c. 776–869) – <i>Kitab al-Hayawan</i> (animal book) includes plant observations.
Key Figures	• Ibn al-Baitar (1197–1248) – <i>Kitab al-Jami' li-Mufradat al-Ghiza</i> (comprehensive pharmacopoeia).

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Region

Highlights

European

Monasteries

Preservation of classical texts; cultivation of medicinal gardens.

Herbals

Illustrated manuscripts (e.g., *Herbarium* of **Hortus Sanitatis**, 1491) combine text with woodcut images.

Takeaway: Botany remained tied to medicine, but scholars began to emphasize direct observation, classification by morphological traits, and the use of illustrations.

3. Renaissance & Early Modern Period (15th–18th centuries)

3.1. The Age of Exploration (15th–17th c.)

- European voyages introduced thousands of new species (e.g., potatoes, tomatoes, coffee).
- Botanical gardens (e.g., **Orto Botanico di Padova**, 1545) served as research centers and acclimatization sites.

3.2. Systematic Taxonomy

Botanist	Main Work	Contribution
Leonhart Fuchs (1501–1566)	<i>De Historia Stirpium</i> (1542)	First modern herbarium; detailed plant illustrations.
Rembert Dodoens (1517–1585)	<i>Florae Belgicae</i> (1554)	