

[Skip to content](#)

[GoDutch.com](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Newspaper](#)
- [Genealogy Research](#)
- [Bookstore](#)
- [Business Directory](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [About](#)

[VIEW CART](#) { \$0.00 }

- [News Articles](#)
- [Dutch Recipes](#)
- [Family Page](#)

the Windmill Herald

only \$37.50
per year



Topics

- [Recent News](#)
- [Hofman Case Investigation](#)
- [Excerpts from the Windmill](#)
- [Genealogy](#)
- [World War II](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Dutch Exploration](#)
- [Immigration](#)
- [Masee Case Investigation](#)
- [History](#)

Features

- [Cities](#)
- [Recipes](#)
- [FamilyPage](#)

Reach the Dutch community in North America by advertising in the Windmill Herald

[Advertise](#)
for as little as \$35.00

Keyword search recipes or articles

News Articles

Dutch cooperative charts way for reintroduction of madder culture

New opportunities for natural dyes

Tags: [Excerpts from the Windmill](#)

STEENBERGEN, North Brabant – Synthetic colouring agents killed the viability of the madder crops in the late 1800s. With the rising interest in natural colouring agents Turfs rood, as it once was known, is making a comeback in Dutch agriculture. The Steenberg-based farmers cooperative Rubia Pigmentaria Naturalia BV is spearheading the reintroduction with an 100 hectare crop. Meekrap as it is called in Dutch, at one time was grown particularly in Zeeland, the South Holland islands and Noord-Brabant and was used by textile producers for centuries.

Harvested for its roots, madder – *Rubia tinctorum* – grows to a height of 60 to 90 centimetres (roughly two to three feet) and blossoms with small yellow flowers. The plant's roots with a maximum of one metre go deeper and contain a red substance which the cooperative grinds to powder. Last year's harvest netted 3,000 kilogram a hectare, about fifty percent higher than had been anticipated. Madder is seen by farmers as a substitute to sugar beets, an increasingly unattractive crop.

Used for dyeing leather and textiles, madder also has medicinal value. In antiquity, the Greeks and the Romans also used madder to treat rheumatism and other ailments.

Professor A. Capelle, who had taught industrial processes of agricultural crops for a number of years, discovered information among the papers of a grand-aunt about the madder culture in his ancestral province of Zeeland, arousing his professional curiosity. Since the madder culture had disappeared from the Netherlands over a century ago, he researched its history before promoting his madder culture concept to farmers and industrialists. According to Capelle, the culture needs to be totally rediscovered and requires pioneering by his group of 25 farmers.

The cooperative provides its members with the cuttings. They plant these with machines also used for other crops. Growers harvest the crop with equipment designed for the asparagus industry. Madder takes two to three years to mature.

Formerly a fairly lucrative but back-breaking culture, migrants from the Goeree town of Ouddorp who had helped to reclaim the Texel wetlands introduced the crop there in the mid 1800s. Goeree growers used to dry the madder in special buildings in their fields of which some remnants have survived.

It also has been suggested that the demise of the madder culture, was one of the reasons behind wholesale emigration from notably Ouddorp. Many families left Goeree when Dutch agricultural crops such as grain lost its competitive edge to the USA and the Ukraine and synthetic innovations in the 1870s upstaged the viability of the madder culture (prices dropped from 25 guilders to 16 for 100 pounds of refined madder).

Rubia Pigmentaria management has taken its product to leather and textiles tradeshows where the industries have shown a keen interest. If this holds, the Netherlands perhaps will lead the way with an agricultural commodity which never should have disappeared in the first place.

- [Home](#)
- [Newspaper](#)
 - [Articles and Features](#)

- [Recipes](#)
- [Family Page](#)
- [Manage Account](#)
- [Subscribe](#)
- [Advertise](#)

- [Genealogy Research](#)
 - [The Basics: A Guide](#)
- [Book Store](#)
 - [Books](#)
 - [Shopping Cart](#)

- [Business Directory](#)
 - [Join](#)
 - [Benefits](#)
- [About](#)