



Vilmorin: The Vegetable Garden

Werner Dressendorfer

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The scientific and artistic excellence of the *Album Vilmorin*

The French company **Vilmorin-Andrieux & Cie** arose in the 18th century from the collaboration of Philippe Victoire de Vilmorin—a grain and plant merchant and connoisseur—and his father-in-law, Pierre Andrieux, Botanist to the King. The Vilmorins, though only producers and merchants on the Paris market, contributed enormously to the botanical and agronomic knowledge of their time. Their first catalogue, comprising all kinds of seeds for kitchen-garden vegetables—including legumes, salad plants, flower seeds and bulbs—appeared in 1766. It was followed by a series of *Publications périodiques* in which the quality of botanical and horticultural information was equaled only by the illustrations. By the mid-19th century, the firm had become the most important seed company in the world—active in production, trade, and scientific advances, thanks largely to Louis de Vilmorin's crucial research into selection and heredity in the 1850s.

At the height of its international renown, the company published its splendid *Album Vilmorin. Les Plantes potagères* (The Vegetable Garden, 1850–1895) **featuring 46 magnificent color plates**. The Vilmorins employed some 15 painters to create this work of agro-botanic iconography; most had trained as artist-naturalists at the *Jardin des Plantes*, the former Royal Gardens, including **Elisa Champin**, who painted a large number of the finest plates. These illustrations—reproduced here with exquisite care and accuracy—transcend mere artistic interest, beautiful as they are; they are also a valuable resource for anyone researching cultivarietal evolution, and old varieties of fruits and vegetables.

About the author:

Prof. Dr. Werner Dressendorfer, pharmaceutical historian and lecturer at the university of Erlangen, is currently conducting research into the history of medicinal plants from a socio-cultural viewpoint. He has authored numerous pharmaceutical publications and scientific papers on the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

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