

MICHEL ADANSON BIOGRAPHY

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Adanson, Michel (1727–1806)—discoverer of the genus *Adansonia*, the Baobab tree, which is named in his honor and describer of the genus *Kalanchoe*, among others.



Born in Aix-en-Provence, France, on 7 April 1727, Michel Adanson became a botanist, systematist, naturalist, taxonomist, and biologist. He studied Greek in order to be able to read natural science books in their original language and attended botany lectures by Antoine Laurent de Jussieu (1748–1836) and his uncle, Bernard de Jussieu (1699–1777). Adanson published a two-volume book, *Familles des Plantes*, in 1763 and 1764, in which he rejected all artificial classifications for natural ones. He classified plants based on many anatomical features, in contrast to Carolus Linnaeus' (1707–1778) emphasis on flower structure. (Adanson's scheme was based somewhat on an earlier system by Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656–1708).) By refusing to use the new binomial classification of Linnaeus, Adanson's system was ignored until a natural classification system developed by Antoine Laurent de Jussieu (1748–1836) replacing Linnaeus' system toward the end of the 18th century.

Of special interest to the succulent plant enthusiast is the Baobab tree, *Adansonia digitata*, discovered by Adanson in Senegal in 1749. The genus was named in his honor by Linnaeus in 1759. In 1763 Adanson described genera *Ceratosanthes* (Caribbean Islands, South America), *Kalanchoe* (Asia, Africa, Madagascar, America, India, Indochina, Malaysia, Cyprus & Socotra Islands), *Moringa* (India), and *Talinum* (tropical & subtropical zones of both hemispheres, particularly Namibia, Mexico, West Indies to British Columbia). *Tula (Nolana) adansonii* was named in his honor by Johann Jakob Roemer (1763–1819) & Josef August Schultes (1773–1831) in 1819.

Adanson became an eccentric towards the end of his life and died in Paris 3 August 1806. He asked only that a garland of flowers from the 58 families he had differentiated decorate his grave. His papers and herbarium, after remaining with his family for over a century, finally went to the Hunt Botanical Library in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania around 1960.

References:

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