

# *Gentiana lutea* L.

Great Yellow Gentian

Family: Gentianaceae

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A perennial herbaceous plant known as "great" because of its **size, considerably larger** than other species in the same genus (height of 40-140 cm).

It has an erect, cylindrical stem with wide, lanceolate, opposite leaves of a grey-green colour due to a waxy patina on the surface, without a stalk (except the basal leaves which have a short stalk), up to 30 cm long and 15 cm wide, with clear parallel veins.

The flowers have a **yellow crown** divided into 5-6 long, slim lobes, which meet in clusters numbering from 3 to 10, set all on the same level around a central axis at the branching point of the leaves. The plant is late-flowering, over the age of 10 years.

The roots are structured around a taproot system, with a main root that is far more developed than the secondary or lateral roots: this central root contains strong, bitter substances that have been widely used since the Middle Ages in liquors and for medicinal purposes.

Origin, altitude, soil, age, root diameter and even time of harvesting all have a strong impact on the amount of **bitters present**.

In Aosta Valley, the species is found almost exclusively in the western area, and is rare or absent elsewhere. It grows from 1,200 m to over 2,200 m, in grasslands with a limestone substrate.

It is sometimes **confused with False Helleborine (*Veratrum album*)**, which is similar but highly toxic. The two species are easily distinguished by observing the leaves: the False Helleborine has parchment-like alternating leaves, while the Great Yellow Gentian has opposite paired leaves.



(Photo MRSN)