Gentian

En Español (Spanish Version)

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Gentiana lutea

Principal Proposed Uses
• Poor Appetite; Poor Digestion

For reasons that aren't entirely clear, bitter plants have the capacity to stimulate appetite, and gentian ranks high on the scale of bitterness. Two of its constituents, gentiopicrin and amarogentin, taste bitter even when diluted by a factor of 50,000! ¹

In traditional European herbology, gentian and other bitter herbs are believed to strengthen the digestive system when taken over a period of time. However, in Chinese medicine, gentian is regarded as a rather intense herb that should seldom be taken over the long term. We are not sure which view is right, although we tend to lean toward the Chinese viewpoint, and recommend gentian only for short-term use.

What Is Gentian Used for Today?

Gentian extracts are widely sold in liquor stores under the name “bitters,” for the purpose of increasing appetite. Tinctures are also sold medicinally for the same purpose.

Dosage

A typical dosage of gentian is 20 drops of tincture 15 minutes before meals. To make the intensely bitter taste more tolerable, you can mix the tincture in juice or water.

Safety Issues

Gentian is somewhat mutagenic, meaning that it can cause changes in the DNA of bacteria. ² For this reason, gentian should not be taken during pregnancy. Safety in young children, nursing women, or those with severe liver or kidney disease is also not established.

In the short term, gentian rarely causes any side effects, except for occasional worsening of ulcer pain and heartburn. (For some people, it relieves stomach problems.)