

Gentianella spenceri

COMMON NAMES

Spencer's gentian

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Violet/Purple, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Plants monocarpic, biennial, height in flower 85–270 mm. Caudex unbranched, 20–100 mm long, stolons absent. Root 2.0–3.1 mm diameter at stem base. Flowering stems terminal and lateral, 1–7 per plant, largest flowering stem 2.0–3.3 mm diameter at base, 1.9–2.7 mm diameter when dry, green or tinted crimson, lateral flowering stems erect, flowering stem leaves 1–3 pairs per stem, lowest pedicels from near base of flowering stem or halfway up flowering stem. Rosette of leaves present and distinct from flowering stem leaves, leaves elliptic, orbicular, obovate, or ovate, 25.0–93.0 × 13.0–22.0 mm, green or tinted crimson below or tinted purple-black, flat or with petiole v-shaped, sometimes very shallowly 2- or 3-lobed, sometimes recurved at the apex, leaf apex usually rounded, occasionally acute or retuse, petiole absent to distinct, 15.0–53.0 × 2.0–5.8 mm wide at leaf base. Flowering stem leaves orbicular with shorter petioles than rosette leaves or sessile. Pedicels 1 or 2 per leaf axil, 1.5–10.0 × 1.0–1.2 mm diameter, 0.4–0.7 mm diameter when dry. Flowers 3–33 per plant, 9.0–16 mm long. Calyx 6.0–11.0 mm long, green, hairs at calyx–corolla fusion line absent or present; lobes 5.3–9.3 × 1.4–2.1 mm, plane, apices acute, margins smooth or minutely denticulate, sinus hairs absent or sparse. Corolla 9.3–14 mm long, white, sometimes tinted on outside of corolla lobes, veins usually coloured purple or crimson, rarely uncoloured; tube 2.5–4.1 mm long; lobes 5.4–9.9 × 3.2–4.4 mm wide, hairs below sinus absent or present; nectary 0.8–2.0 mm from corolla base. Filaments 5.9–8.0 mm long from corolla base, 0.6–0.7 mm wide. Anthers 1.1–1.3 mm long, anther wall dark red, mouth orange-red, extrorse at anthesis, pollen dull pink. Stigma crimson. Ovules 4–33 per ovary. Capsules 6.2–12.0 mm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

G. spenceri are its orbicular leaves with apex rounded, and often with a very slight lobing of the leaf, the unbranched caudex with a single basal rosette of leaves, the short pedicels (1.5–10 mm long), the few pairs of flowering stem leaves (1–3 pairs), the smaller late flowers arising from low on the plant, the pandurate calyx lobes, and the purple corolla veins

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: South Island (from Nelson through Westland to about the Whitcombe River)



Cobb valley, February. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Haystack Creek. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Licence: CC BY-NC.

HABITAT

Subalpine Nothofagus forest and associated scrub, forest clearings in such forest, and along ridges

GENUS

Gentianella

FAMILY

Gentianaceae

AUTHORITY

Gentianella spenceri (Kirk) T.N.Ho et S.W.Liu

SYNONYMS

Gentiana spenceri Kirk, Chionogentias spenceri (Kirk) L.G.Adams

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December – March

FRUITING

January - June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult. Should not be removed from the wild

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available.

ETYMOLOGY

gentianella: Little Gentiana (named after Gentius, 6th century king of Illyria, who found the roots of the yellow gentian to have a healing effect on his malaria-stricken troops)

NVS CODE

GENSPE

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient | Qualifiers: NR Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "[Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025](#)" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Glenny, D. 2004: A revision of the genus Gentianella in New Zealand. New Zealand Journal of Botany 42: 361-530.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (1 November 2004). Description based on Glenny (2004)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/gentianella-spenceri/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026