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Gentian Drama

One of the last plants to bloom in the Denver metro area are the gentians. In fact, when you see gentians blooming you know that the first snowfall is about six weeks away! They are easily recognizable by their blue or bluish-purple, tubular flowers with longitudinal pleats or folds, and opposite, sessile leaves.

However, one gentian in particular, *Gentiana affinis* (pleated gentian), is taxonomically troubling. It is unclear whether or not we should recognize *Gentiana bigelovii* (Bigelow's gentian) as separate from *G. affinis*. In iNaturalist, the two are lumped together under *G. affinis*. One of the best defining features in support of separation of the two species is flower color, with *G. affinis* having a bluish-purple corolla (flower color) and *G. bigelovii* having a pale blue corolla. *Gentiana bigelovii* is also typically found at lower elevations while *G. affinis* is found above 7,500 feet. This flower color is not preserved well in herbarium specimens, making it hard to use specimens to separate the two species.

Help Denver Botanic Gardens document the flower color of *Gentiana affinis* along this elevation gradient by photographing as many plants as possible in the month of September. Post your findings to iNaturalist so they will be automatically added to the [Denver EcoFlora Project](#). Let's try to sort out this gentian drama together!

Results of August EcoQuest: Find Mountaintop Thistles



Cirsium scopulorum

We sent you on a quest to document flower color in the alpine thistles for our August EcoQuest. While no yellow-flowered alpine thistles were recorded, seven purple-flowered alpine thistles were found. These observations will help Head Curator of Natural History Collections, Jennifer Ackerfield, determine the extent of the purple-flowered alpine thistle range.

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What is an EcoQuest?

EcoQuests are part of the Denver EcoFlora Project. These monthly quests challenge citizens to become citizen scientists and observe, study and conserve the native plants of the Denver – Boulder metro area via iNaturalist, an easy-to-use mobile app.

How Do I Get Started?

1. Download the iNaturalist app or register online at [iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org).
2. Take photos of the plants in bloom that you find on your daily neighborhood walk. It is okay if they are weeds! Avoid taking photos of cultivated plants in gardens or in your home.
3. If you are concerned about revealing the location of sensitive plants or observations at your own house, you can hide the exact location from the public by changing the "geoprivacy" of the observation to "obscured."
4. Post your findings on iNaturalist via the app.

5. Your observations will automatically be added to the Denver EcoFlora Project.
6. Sign up to be a member of the Denver EcoFlora Project on iNaturalist to receive updates and additional information.

How Do I Participate Given COVID-19?

As a participant, it is up to you how much or how little you take part. Please stay close to home and maintain a social distance of 6 feet from others. Wear a cloth mask in public areas. Respect closures and avoid places of high use. Do only what feels safe for you and your family and is in accordance with your local regulations.

What is the Goal?

The Denver EcoFlora Project is designed to meaningfully connect citizens with biodiversity and to assemble novel observations and data on the metro area's flora to better inform policy decisions and conservation strategies.