



Scientific Name:

Limbarda crithmoides

Synonym:

Inula crithmoides

English:

Golden Samphire

Maltese:

*ix-xorbett, ix-xorbegg,
ix-xurbegg*

Native to West Europe and the Mediterranean region, the Golden Samphire is a low-growing evergreen shrub characteristic of coastal areas. It is common in the Maltese Islands, where it occurs along the entire rocky coast, but also along salt marshes, dunes and seaside cliffs, though occasionally one can come across it a few kilometres inland too.

This species is well adapted to live in harsh conditions, even withstanding high levels of salt. It grows up to 1m in height, and its green dense foliage, which is succulent, often stands out against the arid surroundings during the summer months. The glossy leaves are cylindrical or flattened, and are directly attached to the base of the stem. The semi-sweet, yellow flower heads occur in clusters, appearing mainly between summer and autumn, although a few can be observed in other months too - the flowers of the Golden Samphire are particularly important to many insects since many wild plants are not in blossom during the flowering period of this species. Following pollination, the flowers then develop into fruits with brownish-white hairs, and when mature, the seeds detach and get dispersed by the wind.

The young shoots, leaves and flower buds of the Golden Samphire are edible (the so-called '*ħażura*'). Throughout Europe, it used to be pickled or cooked, most often used as a relish. In addition, the root of this plant was also used by Lebanese folk as a tonic. In the Maltese Islands, the Golden Samphire enjoys favourable conservation status, and even though it is not directly protected, it is most often found in priority habitats for which protected areas have been designated under the Natura 2000 network.

