

Asplenium gracillimum

COMMON NAME

hen & chicken fern

SYNONYMS

Asplenium bulbiferum subsp. *gracillimum* (Colenso) Brownsey

FAMILY

Aspleniaceae

AUTHORITY

Asplenium gracillimum Colenso

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

NVS CODE

ASPGRA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 288

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands. Also Australia.

HABITAT

Coastal to subalpine. Usually in lowland forest where it is a common species of the ground-layer, especially in high rainfall areas. Commonly associated with riparian forest, and as a species of base-rich substrates but also typical of colluvium and stream side banks. It is commonly sympatric with *Asplenium bulbiferum*. *Asplenium gracillimum* appears to have a higher elevational range than *A. bulbiferum* and is also more common in drier eastern forests than *A. bulbiferum*. Chatham Island populations of *A. gracillimum* are frequently bulbiferous.



Tongariro. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Tongariro. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rhizome short, stout, erect, bearing ovate scales up to 15 × 5 mm. **Stipes** 50–300 mm long, brown on underside, green above, stout, covered in small brown ovate scales with apices drawn into long filiform projections. **Laminae** lanceolate to elliptic, 0.15–1.20 m, 70–300 mm, bi- to tripinnate, sometimes bearing bulbils. **Raches** dark green to blue-green, rarely bulbiferous, scaly, prominently grooved. **Pinnae** 15–30 (or more) pairs, ovate to narrowly ovate, acuminate, shortly stalked, 30–200 × 10–50 mm, scaly on underside, basal pair pointing downwards when fresh. **Secondary pinnae** sessile or shortly stalked, very narrowly elliptic to ovate or elliptic, obtuse, deeply serrate or sometimes almost pinnate, decreasing in size from base to apex, basal acroscopic pinnule often enlarged (up to 40 × 10 mm). **Ultimate pinnules** narrowly oblong, ± entire to crenate-serrate, up to 10 mm long. **Sori** numerous, broad, submarginal, 2–4 mm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

Asplenium gracillimum is only ever likely to be confused with the closely related *A. bulbiferum* G.Forst. From that species it is distinguished by its infrequently bulbiferous, dark green to blue-green fronds, and stipe scales which have long filiform apices. *Asplenium gracillimum* is an octoploid (2n = 288) and *A. bulbiferum* tetraploid (2n = 144), so hybrids between these two species are sterile.

FLOWER COLOURS

No flowers

LIFE CYCLE

Minute spores are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown, and popular in cultivation. However, most plants sold as this species are the sterile hybrid *A. ×lucrosum* Perrie et Brownsey (*A. bulbiferum* × *A. dimorphum* Kunze). An excellent pot plant but as with all asplenias prone to infestations of scale and mealy bugs.

ETYMOLOGY

asplenium: From the Greek a- ‘without’ and splene ‘spleen’, a northern hemisphere species, the black spleenwort (*Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*), was once believed to be a cure for diseases of the spleen.

gracillimum: Slender or most graceful; from the Latin gracilis

ATTRIBUTION

Description from Brownsey (1977)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Brownsey PJ. 1977. A taxonomic revision of the New Zealand species of *Asplenium*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 15(1): 39–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1977.10429618>.
Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/asplenium-gracillimum/>