

Acaena pallida

COMMON NAMES

sand piripiri, sand bidibid

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, RR, SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

An evergreen shiny bright green herb, sand dune inhabitant, which spreads up to 2 metres across and about 15cm in height. The pinnate leaves are bluntly toothed and lack hairs on upper surface. The globe shaped flower balls are white, then grow into a cluster of red hooked spikes, which when ripe brown off, become firm and may stick to your socks or laces when brushed past in order to disperse.

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stoloniferous, prostrate, trailing perennial herb, forming a loose mat up to 2 metres in diameter. **Stems** up to 3 mm diameter, hairy, up to 1 metre long, and/or 15 cm high, rooting at nodes; **Stipules** entire to quadrifid; **Leaves** odd-pinnate, between 45-120 mm long with 9-15 leaflets; **Leaflets** oblong to elliptical 6-30 × 3-13 mm, serrated shallow toothed margin, 8-20 teeth not hair-tipped, terminal leaflet 12-20 mm long, lower leaflets are smaller, upper surface shiny slightly channelled glabrous bright green to dark green veins obvious, lower surface pale green hairy mostly toward mid vein; **Inflorescence scape** 70-180 mm, very hairy; **Capitulum** about 10mm diameter, composed of 80-100 florets, each floret has 4 sepals, 2 stamen, white anthers, 1 style, 1 achene; **Fruit** roughly cone-shaped, each having 4 red barb-tipped spines, up to 10-20 mm long, which mature dry, pale brown or golden brown when ripe, enabling attachment to passing hairy/feathered surfaces as vector, and/or to aid wind dispersal, tiny spines often occur in between foremost spines.

SIMILAR TAXA

A quite unique species in being a dune specialist and having uniquely shiny foliage. *Acaena novae-zelandiae* may be found in dunes too and can be shiny especially new growth, it also has red spikes on unripe fruit. It differs by generally having smaller leaflets 4-17 × 2-10 mm (compared to 6-30 × 3-13 mm), and generally red rachis which are not as hairy as those of *A. pallida*. The leaflets are hair-tipped which is not seen in *A. pallida*. *A. novae-zelandiae* grows in a wider range of habitats than *A. pallida* and is therefore more common, and more often recorded/seen.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: Te Ika-a-Māui | North Island (southern), Te Waipounamu | South Island, Rakiura | Stewart Island, Rēkohu | Wharekauri | Chatham Island. Also S.E. Australia and Tasmania.

HABITAT

Coastal fine gravels, sand dunes only.



Wellington south coast. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 12/03/1994, Licence: CC BY.



Wellington south coast. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 12/03/1994, Licence: CC BY.

THREATS

Coastal development and general use by humans, herbivores, and stock, causing damage through trampling.

GENUS

Acaena

FAMILY

Rosaceae

AUTHORITY

Acaena pallida (Kirk) Allan

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October-January.

FRUITING

October-May.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Spiny hypanthia are dispersed by attaching to fur, feathers and clothing and possibly also dispersed by wind and granivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

CULTIVATION

Occasionally found in specialist nurseries. Easy to grow from fresh seed.

ETYMOLOGY

acaena: From the Greek 'akanthos' thorn, referring to the spiny calyx that many species have

pallida: From the Latin pallidus 'pale or pallid'

NVS CODE

ACAPAL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, RR, SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: CI, NStr, PF, RR, St 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

- Allan HH. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Volume 1. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsidea, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledons. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. pg.360.
- Lloyd K. 2001. A Key and notes for *Acaena* (Rosaceae) in New Zealand. *Botanical Society of Otago Newsletter* 25. Pgs. 10-14.
- 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>.
- Webb CJ, Sykes WR, Garnock-Jones PJ. 1988. Flora of New Zealand, Volume IV. Naturalised Pteridophytes, Gymnosperms, Dicotyledons. Botany Division, Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, Christchurch, NZ. Pg. 1063.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by MD Ward (August 29th 2025). Description adapted from Lloyd (2001), Webb *et al.* (1988), Allan (1961).

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/acaena-pallida/>

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