

Acanthus mollis

COMMON NAMES

bear's breeches

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Perennial herb to about 120 cm, with thick roots. Petiole usually 10-50 cm on leaves arising from the root crown, much shorter (2-5 cm) on leaves arising from vertical stem. Leaves variable, but usually dark green and with several lobes. White flowers with pink, purple or brownish veins are produced on the central tall spike, these mature first at the bottom of the spike. Seeds are produced in individual capsules 3-4 cm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished by the large divided leaves and the distinctive flower head.

HABITAT

Usually found near old settlements, in partial shade and along riverbanks.

GENUS

Acanthus

FAMILY

Acanthaceae

AUTHORITY

Acanthus mollis L.

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

October, November, December, January, February, March, April

FRUITING

November, December, January, February, March, April, May

YEAR NATURALISED

1958

ORIGIN

S.W. Europe

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental



Hutt River Trail, Silverstream, Upper Hutt.
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:
17/06/2006, Licence: CC BY.



Acanthus mollis. Photographer: Richard
Hursthouse, Licence: CC BY.

TOLERANCES

Can tolerate moderate shade, but flowers best in at least partial light.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Primarily escapes from cultivation by vegetative spread, although seed is viable. Dispersed by gravity, water and birds. Root fragments grow easily and once established this plant can be hard to eliminate from a site.

ETYMOLOGY

acanthus: From the Greek ákantha 'thorn'

mollis: Soft

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

NVS CODE

ACAMOL

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/acanthus-mollis/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026