Aciphylla aurea

COMMON NAMES
golden spaniard, golden speargrass

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
A large robust yellowish-green golden spikey clump which may grow up to 1 metre with a tall robust very spikey flower head reaching 1.5 metres. The leaves are long, narrow and very sharp at the end, bunches of white flowers form on the tall spike.

Old Man Range, December. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Kakanui Mountains. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

FLOWER COLOURS
Cream, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
.Very robust tufted yellowish-green herb to 1.5 m tall when in flower. Rosettes single or multiple, to 1 m diameter. **Leaves** many, stout, 1-pinnate to irregularly 2-pinnate (sometimes only 1 secondary pinna developed), to 70 cm long. **Sheaths** thick with thin margins, yellow or yellowish-green, 25 mm wide at apex; **stipules** stout, to 27 cm long × 5-8 mm wide, tapering, pungent; **petioles** approximately 10-20 cm long × 10-16 mm wide; margins finely serrulate on cartilaginous margin; internodes (inter-pinna spacing) 5-6 cm long. **Primary pinnae** 2-4 pairs, spaced, flat, striate, midrib obscure, c. 20 cm long × 7 mm wide, abrubtly narrowing to pungent point; secondary pinnae little shorter, pungent. **Flowering stem** of male and female similar (female narrower and darker), stout, ribbed, 80 cm or more long, bracted along most of length; bracts more or less erect in male, spreading in female; lower bracts without flowers, yellow; **lower bract sheaths** to 8 × 1.5 cm tapering to c. 9 mm wide, thin, smooth; lower bract stipules to 8 cm long x 2-3 mm wide, acicular; lower bract lamina usually simple, sometimes bifid, to 22 cm long × 4 mm wide, acicular. **Umbels of male** plants distributed along peduncle; involucral bracts linear, longer than rays. **Umbels of female** plants on peduncles up to 15 cm long; umbellules crowded on short rays; involucral bracts linear. **Fruit** of two mericarps; mericarps oblong-elliptic to elliptic, (3.5-)4.0-6.0(-6.5) mm, with 3-4 narrowly winged ribs and 1-2 reduced to low ridges, vittae obscured

SIMILAR TAXA
Similar to *Aciphylla colensoi* which has much shorter stipules and crowded pinnae on leaves and also *A. horrida* which has usually 1-pinnate leaves and inflorescences very broad at the base

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Te Waipounamu | **South Island**, east of the main axial ranges, Mt Richmond Forest Park to Beaumont, Banks Peninsula to Mt Cargill vicinity.

HABITAT
Montane to low alpine (300 - 1500 m.a.s.l.), well-drained or arid sites including rocky areas, dry grassland and tussock grassland.

GENUS
Aciphylla

FAMILY
Apiaceae

AUTHORITY
Aciphylla aurea W.R.B.Oliv.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November - December.

FRUITING
January - February.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
UPL: Obligate Upland
Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
aciphylla: From the Latin acicula 'needle' and the Greek phyllum 'leaf', meaning needle-leaf.
aurea: Golden yellow

NVS CODE
ACIAUR

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 22

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: TL Help
Current regional threat status assessments prepared according to Crisp et al. (2025) are displayed when available. The 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 I. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Psilopsida, Lycopsida, Filicopsida, Gymnospermae, Dicotyledones. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 1085 p.
Mark AF, Adams NM. 1995. *New Zealand alpine plants*, 2nd Edition. Godwit Publishing, Auckland.
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 & Simpson MJA. 2001. *Seeds of NZ gymnosperms and dicotyledons*. Manuka Press, Christchurch.
Wilson HD. 1996. *Wild plants of Mount Cook National Park*. Manuka Press, Christchurch

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted by Mike Thorsen from Allan (1961), Mark and Adams (1995), Webb and Simpson (2001) and Wilson (1996).
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/aciphylla-aurea/

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