

# Aciphylla subflabellata

## COMMON NAMES

speargrass

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DPT

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

## FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout perennial forming stout rosettes. Stems up to 0.8 m long. Leaves yellow-green to grey-green, narrowly subflabellate-bipinnate. Sheaths membranous, up to 20 mm long, ligules 2, up to 10 mm long; stipules 20 mm long, irregularly bipinnate. Petioles 25 x 5 mm, concavo-convex with internodes up to 25 mm long. Primary pinnae 3-4 pairs, these strongly serrulate-crenulate on midrib and margins, sometimes pinnate again with leaflets up to 200 x 3 mm, narrowly acicular. Stems stout, deeply grooved up to 1 m x 25 mm, including inflorescence 0.5-0.6 m long. Bracts numerous, close-set; sheaths up to 70 x 10 mm; stipules erect, simple to bifid, up to 150 x 1 mm; central leaflet up to 300 mm long, at length strongly reflexed, margins serrulate. Umbels exceeding the bract-sheaths especially in the male inflorescence. Mericarps 5-12 mm long with 5 ribs, 3-4 of these winged.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Perhaps most similar to *A. squarrosa*., and in someways resembling a more finely divided varaint of it. *A. subflabellata* is a much smaller plant than the typical form of *A. squarrosa*, and differs by the subflabellate flattened leaves - a condition caused by the close-set leaf pinnae which are positioned more or less in the same plane as the leaf axis

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island in the east from south-eastern Marlborough to Southland

## HABITAT

Montane to subalpine (300-1400 m a.s.l.). Usually in dry sites on alluvial terraces, gentle rolling slopes and colluvium, intermontane basins amongst short or tall tussocks and on the margins of grey scrub. Sometimes on or near rock outcrops or amongst boulders.

## THREATS

Widespread but generally never common. Possibly it is more threatened than believed because many of its lowland habitats are extremely modified, weed infested and plants are browsed where accessible by cattle, rabbits and hares. Current herbarium evidence suggests that this species is still poorly known but that from available evidence it is naturally uncommon over large parts of its stated range.



Wilberforce Valley, Canterbury. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 03/10/2004, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Upper Clarence (January). Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## GENUS

Aciphylla

## FAMILY

Apiaceae

## AUTHORITY

Aciphylla subflabellata W.R.B.Oliv.

## SYNONYMS

None

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

December - February

## FRUITING

February - May

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Winged schizocarps are dispersed primarily by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

One of the easier species to cultivate, though it dislikes humidity and excessive moisture. Should be planted in a sunny, free draining situation. Once planted do not transplant or disturb roots. Can be grown in a tub.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland

Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

## PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for April 2011](#) for the full story.

## ETYMOLOGY

**aciphylla**: From the Latin acicula 'needle' and the Greek phyllum 'leaf', meaning needle-leaf.

**subflabellata**: Somewhat fan-like

## NVS CODE

ACISUB

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

2004 | Sparse

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NStr, PF, Sp 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, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. I. Government Printer, Wellington.

Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285-309

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (1 September 2004). Description based on Allan 1961).

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/aciphylla-subflabellata/>

## PDF DATE

27 May 2026