

Agrostis capillaris

COMMON NAMES

browntop

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tufted perennial grass to 70 cm tall, all parts hairless, dark to bluish-green. **Roots** with rhizomes, occ stolons. **Leaf-blade** flat, short and narrow, 100–150 × 1–5 mm; ribs regular, margins slightly rough. **Ligule** short, membranous and translucent, almost invisible. **Leaf-sheath** rounded, usually smooth. **Emerging leaf** rolled. **Seedhead** open, usually up to 15 cm long with spreading branches, fine, light brown, seeds tiny, brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

The plant has delicate feathery brown flower heads about 45 cm tall (Hilgendorf 1926). The plant has slender underground stems that give off numerous shoots and so forms a very close turf under lawn conditions (Hilgendorf 1926).

HABITAT

Terrestrial. Plant of coastal, lowland, montane and subalpine habitats (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). The plant is able to grow on poor soils of low fertility (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Plant usually outcompeted on high fertility sites (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). The plant is prevalent on the heavy soils of the Wairarapa (Hilgendorf 1926). Plant found in scrub and forest margin, both short and tall tussocklands, herbfields, fernlands, sanddunes and river beds (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). The plant is found in cultivated lands and pasture communities (Hilgendorf 1926).

GENUS

Agrostis

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Agrostis capillaris L.

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December, January



Ahuriri Valley. Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken: 25/01/2013, Licence: CC BY.



Te Awa Kairangi / Hutt River. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 19/03/2007, Licence: CC BY.

FRUITING

mid-late April

YEAR NATURALISED

1867

ORIGIN

Europe, Temperate Asia

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Agricultural

TOLERANCES

Tolerant of drought and frost, slightly tolerant to shade and poor drainage (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995).

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Perennial. Vegetatively spreading perennial, predominantly outcrossing; tetraploid (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Reproduction sexual and asexual. Seed dispersed by wind, water, humans and vertebrates (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995).

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

agrostis: Greek name for a kind of grass

capillaris: From the Latin capillus 'hair' or 'thread', meaning hair-like or thread-like

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

AGRCAP

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Hilgendorf FW. 1926. Weeds of New Zealand and how to eradicate them. Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, Christchurch, NZ.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/agrostis-capillaris/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026