Alisma plantago-aquatica

COMMON NAMES
water plantain

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Monocots

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
A marginal aquatic plant, with wide lance-shaped leaves, with many tiny pale lilac flowers held on a pyramid-shaped inflorescence, much taller than the rest of the plant.

FLOWER COLOURS
Lilac, Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Leafy emergent perennial herb up to c. 1 m high, although non-flowering plants are much shorter. Aerial parts die off over winter to the rootstock. Leaves all basal, broad ovate 8-20 × 3-10 cm, with a rounded base with a long petiole up to or exceeding the leaf blade. Petiole is semi-circular in cross-section (D-shaped). Inflorescence a large, much-branched panicle; branches whorled. Flowers usually pale lilac, c. 1 cm across. C. 20 rounded and flattened seeds (achenes) c. 2.5 mm long, in a dense circular head (Croasdale et al., 1994).

SIMILAR TAXA
Alisma lanceolatum has narrower leaves and pink rather than lilac coloured flowers. Sagittaria platyphylla has larger flowers on a smaller inflorescence and triangular petioles

DISTRIBUTION
Scattered and locally common from Northland to northern Southland, but absent from large parts of southern aMargins of still and slow flowing water bodies and wetlands.nd eastern North Island and eastern South Island.

HABITAT
Margins of still and slow flowing water bodies and wetlands.

GENUS
Alisma

FAMILY
Alismataceae

AUTHORITY
Alisma plantago-aquatica L.

FLOWERING
Summer

Taupo Swamp, Plimmerton. Apr 2007. Photographer: Robyn Smith, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Taupo Swamp, Plimmerton. Apr 2007. Photographer: Robyn Smith, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FRUITING
Summer to autumn

YEAR NATURALISED
1929

ORIGIN
Native to Northern Temperate regions and Australia.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Possibly ornamental pond plant, or a seed or soil contaminant.

CONTROL TECHNIQUES
Rarely problematic and normally controlled in New Zealand.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Spreads by waterfowl and water dispersed seed.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

NVS CODE
ALIPLA

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Aston, H.I. (1977). Aquatic plants of Australia. A guide to the identification of the aquatic ferns and flowering plants of Australia, both native and naturalised. Melbourne University Press. 368pp.
Croasdale, H., Flint E. A. and Racine, M. M. (1994). Flora of New Zealand Volume 3: Freshwater algae, chlorophyta, desmids with ecological comments on their habitats, Staurodesmus Staurastrum and the Filamentous desmids. Manaaki Whenua Press: Lincoln, New Zealand.
Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.
Preston, C.D.; Croft, J.M. (1997). Aquatic plants in Britain and Ireland. Harley Books, 365pp.

ATTRIBUTION
Prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/alisma-plantago-aquatica/

PDF DATE
08 June 2026