

# Alternanthera philoxeroides

## COMMON NAMES

alligator weed

## BIOSTATUS

Exotic

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

## SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Sprawling emergent perennial herb. Leaves are bright green and waxy. They are between 5-10 cm long, up to 2 cm wide, and arranged in opposite pairs on the stem. The white flower looks like a small clover flower and is at the end of a longish stalk. Stems are thick, soft, and hollow, often with a reddish tinge.

## FLOWER COLOURS

White

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

An almost glabrous rhizomatous perennial herb, growing either as terrestrial or rooted emergent, or free flowing aquatic plant. Stems are 10-70cm long often forming large densely interwoven mats. Leaves are dark green, opposite, sessile, linear, 2 to 7 cm long, 5 to 40 mm wide. Flowers are silvery-white, 1.2 to 1.4 cm dia. borne on stalks 2 to 7 cm long rising from the leaf axis. Root is short and filamentous in water, rising mainly from nodes, longer & thicker in soil often extending below 50 cm.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Two native *Alternanthera* species (*A. nahui*) and lesser joyweed (*A. denticulata*), Senegal tea (*Gymnocoronis spilanthoides*), and primrose willow (*Ludwigia peploides*). The native *Alternanthera* species are smaller, with the flowers lacking stalks and located at the base of paired leaves whereas the stalk (peduncle) on *A. philoxeroides* can be up to 9 cm long. Senegal tea has serrated and wavy leaf margins. Primrose willow has alternate leaves.

## DISTRIBUTION

Locally abundant in parts of Northland and Auckland regions. Scattered distribution in Waikato, Bay of Plenty and single sites known from Horizons, Canterbury and West Coast.

## HABITAT

Warm still and slow flowing water bodies, swamps, ponds, stream banks, dune hollows, flooded pasture and cropping land and urban lawns. It will tolerate a wide habitat range including brackish water, amongst pasture and terrestrial crops.

## GENUS

*Alternanthera*

## FAMILY

Amaranthaceae



Karikari peninsula, Sept. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



*Alternanthera philoxeroides*. Photographer: Bec Stanley, Licence: CC BY-SA.

## AUTHORITY

*Alternanthera philoxeroides* (Mart.) Griseb.

## SYNONYMS

*Telanthera philoxeroides*

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

Flowering is not known to occur in NZ. Midsummer till March in Australia (Parsons & Cuthbert, 2001)

## FRUITING

Seed set is unknown in New Zealand.

## YEAR NATURALISED

1906

## ORIGIN

Native to South America.

## REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Accidental, contamination of ballast

## TOLERANCES

Highly tolerant of poor drainage. Tolerant of drought and shade. Slightly tolerant of frost. It will also re-sprout from grazing and other physical damage.

## CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Method of control is dependent on the scale/size of the infestation and the habitat (e.g., the nature of the watercourse). Notify regional council if found (except Northland and Auckland where this plant is widespread)

## LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Reproduction is vegetative by the extension of prostrate stems or stem fragmentation. The floating fringe of marginal mats is also readily fragmented and dispersed. Machinery (e.g. for mechanical drain clearance) has been shown to spread stem fragments between catchments. Seed set is unknown in New Zealand.

In Australia, seeds are produced, but rarely viable under local conditions (Parsons & Cuthbertson, 2001).

Potentially spread by people mistaking weed for mukunu-wenna (*A. sessilis*) which is occasionally used as a vegetable.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

## ETYMOLOGY

**alternanthera:** From the Latin *alternus* 'alternate' and the Greek *anthera* 'anther', meaning alternating anther, probably in reference to the anthers being alternately fertile and barren.

## NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

**This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord.** The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

## 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

ALTPHI

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion et al (2012). Freshwater Pests of New Zealand. NIWA publication.

<http://www.niwa.co.nz/freshwater-and-estuaries/management-tools/identification-guides-and-fact-sheets/freshwater-pest-species>.

Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.

Coffey BT, Clayton JS (1988). New Zealand water plants: a guide to plants found in New Zealand freshwaters. Ruakura Agricultural Centre. 65pp.

Popay et al (2010). An illustrated guide to common weeds of New Zealand, third edition. NZ Plant Protection Society Inc, 416pp.

Timmins, S., McKenzie, I. (1995). Weeds in New Zealand Protected Natural Areas Database. (Department of Conservation technical series, 1172-6873 ; no. 8). Department of Conservation: Wellington.

Johnson, A. T., Smith, H. A. (1972). Plant Names Simplified: Their pronunciation, derivation and meaning. Landsman Bookshop Ltd: Buckenhill, UK.

## ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/alternanthera-philoxeroides/>

## PDF DATE

07 June 2026