Asplenium gracillimum

COMMON NAMES
hen & chicken fern

BIOSTATUS
Native

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Ferns

FLOWER COLOURS
No flowers

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Rhizome short, stout, erect, bearing ovate scales up to 15 × 5 mm. **Stipes** 50–300 mm long, brown on underside, green above, stout, covered in small brown ovate scales with apices drawn into long filiform projections. **Laminae** lanceolate to elliptic, 0.15–1.20 m, 70–300 mm, bi- to tripinnate, sometimes bearing bulbils. **Raches** dark green to blue-green, rarely bulbiferous, scaly, prominently grooved. **Pinnae** 15–30 (or more) pairs, ovate to narrowly ovate, acuminate, shortly stalked, 30–200 × 10–50 mm, scaly on underside, basal pair pointing downwards when fresh. **Secondary pinnae** sessile or shortly stalked, very narrowly elliptic to ovate or elliptic, obtuse, deeply serrate or sometimes almost pinnate, decreasing in size from base to apex, basal acroscopic pinnule often enlarged (up to 40 × 10 mm). **Ultimate pinnules** narrowly oblong, ± entire to crenate-serrate, up to 10 mm long. **Sori** numerous, broad, submarginal, 2–4 mm long.

Norfolk Road, Wairarapa. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/04/2007, Licence: CC BY.

Stipe scales. Wairarapa. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/04/2007, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Asplenium gracillimum is only ever likely to be confused with the closely related *A. bulbiferum* G.Forst. From that species it is distinguished by its infrequently bulbiferous, dark green to blue-green fronds, and stipe scales which have long filiform apices. *Asplenium gracillimum* is an octoploid (2n = 288) and *A. bulbiferum* tetraploid (2n = 144), so hybrids between these two species are sterile.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. New Zealand: North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands. Also Australia.

HABITAT
Coastal to subalpine. Usually in lowland forest where it is a common species of the ground-layer, especially in high rainfall areas. Commonly associated with riparian forest, and as a species of base-rich substrates but also typical of colluvium and stream side banks. It is commonly sympatric with *Asplenium bulbiferum*. *Asplenium gracillimum* appears to have a higher elevational range than *A. bulbiferum* and is also more common in drier eastern forests than *A. bulbiferum*. Chatham Island populations of *A. gracillimum* are frequently bulbiferous.

GENUS
Asplenium

FAMILY
Aspleniaceae

AUTHORITY
Asplenium gracillimum Colenso

SYNONYMS
Asplenium bulbiferum subsp. gracillimum (Colenso) Brownsey

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Minute spores are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown, and popular in cultivation. However, most plants sold as this species are the sterile hybrid *A. ×lucrosum* Perrie et Brownsey (*A. bulbliferum* × *A. dimorphum* Kunze). An excellent pot plant but as with all asplenia prone to infestations of scale and mealy bugs.

ETYMOLOGY
asplenium: From the Greek a- 'without' and splene 'spleen', a northern hemisphere species, the black spleenwort (Asplenium adiantum-nigrum), was once believed to be a cure for diseases of the spleen.
gracillimum: Slender or most graceful; from the Latin gracilis

NVS CODE
ASPGRA

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 288

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

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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
Brownsey PJ. 1977. A taxonomic revision of the New Zealand species of *Asplenium*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany 15(1)*: 39–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1977.10429618.
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.

ATTRIBUTION
Description from Brownsey (1977)

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/asplenium-gracillimum/

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