Austroderia toetoe

COMMON NAMES
toetoe

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Stout, tussock-forming grass up to 4 m tall when in flower. **Leaf-sheath** glabrous, ivory with green midrib, copiously covered in white wax. **Ligule** 4 mm. **Collar** dark brown, upper surface clothed in short hairs. **Leaf-blade** 2(–3) m × 3 cm, straw-yellow, light-green, rarely dark-green, undersides long hairy toward margins, upper surface with a thick weft of hairs at base, otherwise minutely hairy through, and rather harsh due to numerous prickle-teeth. **Culm** up to 4 m, inflorescence portion up to 1 m tall, stiff, erect, densely plumose. **Spikelets** numerous, 25 mm with 2–3 florets per spikelet. **Glumes** equal, 25 mm, > florets. **Lemma** 10 mm, 3-nerved, scabrid. **Palea** 6.5 mm, keels ciliate. **Callus** hairs 1.5 mm. **Rachilla** 0.5 mm. **Flowers** either perfect or female. **Anthers** of perfect flowers 4.8 mm, in females 2.8 mm. **Ovary** of perfect flowers 1 mm, stigma-styles 1.8 mm; female flowers with ovary 1.3 mm, stigma-style 3.5 mm. **Seed** 2.5–3 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA
Easily identified by the stout, erect, densely plumose inflorescences, and ivory leaf sheaths. Their spring or summer flowering, waxy leaf sheaths, and the dead leaves which fold longitudinally and disarticulate in their entirety separate *Austroderia* species from South American pampas grasses (*Cortaderia* species), which flower in autumn, dead leaves curl up toward the leaf base, ultimately decaying to a state resembling wood shavings. Pampas grasses can always be distinguished by their brittle leaves with a prominent midrib—fold a leaf across and it snaps or can be torn easily. *Austroderia* leaves have multiple ribs and cannot be torn across easily.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Confined to the North Island where it grows from about Carters Beach (western Waikato) south to Wellington. There are reports of it from the Waitakere Ranges that require further investigation. It has been planted and has sparingly naturalised on Waiheke Island. Not naturally occurring in the Tongariro-Taupo region on the Volcanic Plateau, but has naturalised from plantings e.g. on the Pihanga Saddle.

HABITAT
Common in freshwater swamps and wet places from sea level to lower montane habitats. Often growing in association with flax/harakeke (*Phormium tenax*).

Ligule. Wainuiomata River mouth. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 26/12/2006, Licence: CC BY.

Spikelet close-up showing anthers. Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 03/02/2007, Licence: CC BY.

THREATS
Abundant and not threatened. Often naturalising in suitable habitats.

GENUS
Austroderia

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Austroderia toetoe (Zotov) N.P.Barker et H.P.Linder

SYNONYMS
Cortaderia toetoe Zotov

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
Yes

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November–February

FRUITING
October–March

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed (as a revegation exercise ripe seed heads can be pinned to soil surface, and if kept damp, soon germinate) and division of established plants.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACW: Facultative Wetland
Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION
Uncommon in cultivation and generally too robust for urban gardens. Occasionally offered by specialist native plant nurseries.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to the grasses of New Zealand

NVS CODE
AUSTOE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 90

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

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Edgar E, Connor HE. 2000. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. V. Grasses. Christchurch, Manaaki Whenua Press. 650 p.
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.

ATTRIBUTION

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/austroderia-toetoe/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026