

Calluna vulgaris

COMMON NAMES

heather

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Shrub to c. 50cm tall; stems puberulent or densely hairy at first, becoming glabrous. Lvs 1.5-3.5mm long (including auricles), oblong-ovate or oblong-lanceolate; densely imbricate on non-flowering branches, keeled on abaxial surface, often ciliate, obtuse; auricles proximally directed. Infl. a narrow raceme 2-9-(c.20) cm long, sometimes almost paniculate. Pedicels very short, puberulent. Bracteoles several, similar to lvs, resembling a calyx below fl., obscuring pedicels. Sepals 2-4mm long, ovate-oblong, pink or mauve-pink, shining, +/- scarious. Corolla c. 3/4 length of calyx, deeply lobed, paler than calyx, persistent, scarious. Stamens c. = corolla; anthers>filaments. Style reddish, exerted. Capsules densely hairy, < perianth, subglobose. Seeds 0.5-0.7mm long, strongly reticulate, often aborted. (Webb.et.al.1988)

SIMILAR TAXA

Tiny green leaves with small purple flowers up to 1m high. Shrub up to 50cm tall, with narrow, elongated inflorescence 2-9cm long of many mauve-pink flowers (Webb et. al. 1988). Leaves are very narrow, overlapping from 1.5-3.5mm long.

HABITAT

Terrestrial. A plant of montane, subalpine and alpine habitats. The plant grows in sites of low - moderate fertility. Plant found in scrub and forest margin, shrubland, tall and short tussockland, herbfields, riverbeds, wetlands, alpine gravel fields, dune slacks and road edges.

GENUS

Calluna

FAMILY

Ericaceae

AUTHORITY

Calluna vulgaris (L.) Hull

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

January, February, March, April



Desert Road. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 22/07/2006, Licence: CC BY.



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FRUITING

late March? - April, but seeds shed into June or later.

YEAR NATURALISED

1910

ORIGIN

Eurasia, N Africa

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental.

TOLERANCES

The plant is highly tolerant to frost and tolerant of poor drainage. The plant is slightly tolerant to drought, but in Europe is intolerant in shallow soils. Resprouting occurs after physical damage, grazing and fire. Seeds are able to sprout after fire.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Perennial. The main cause of spread (Webb et. al. 1988) is from adventitious rooting of larger branches of older plants and fragmentation after disturbance. Creeping rhizomes are produced by the plant. Seed production of one plant is estimated at 161 000 seeds per year. Seeds remain viable for at least 11-12 years, some evidence suggests some have remained viable up to 45 years. Some viable seed production. Seed is dispersed by gravity and wind (100m in 10/s and 250m in 30-40m/s).

ETYMOLOGY

calluna: From the Greek kalluno meaning to brush or clean; refers to the use of the plant as a broom.

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

CALVUL

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/calluna-vulgaris/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026