

# Carex lessoniana

## COMMON NAME

rautahi, cutty grass

## SYNONYMS

*Carex polystachya* A.Rich.

## FAMILY

Cyperaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Carex lessoniana* Steud.

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

## NVS CODE

CARLES

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (widespread), South Island (more common in the northern half, sporadic further south).

## HABITAT

Coastal to lowland (rarely montane). Usually on the margins of peat swamps, or in very wet alluvial forest.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

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



*Carex lessoniana*, Howarth wetland, Te Aroha.  
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*Carex lessoniana*, Howarth wetland, Te Aroha.  
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## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rhizomatous; robust, 0.5–1.5 m tall, bright green to dark green. **Culms** 1.5–5.0 mm diameter, triquetrous, scabrid on the edges; basal sheaths dull brown or red-brown, margins shredding into fibres wrapped round the culm. **Leaves** numerous usually much > culms, 3.5–8.0 mm wide, double-folded, margins scabrid. **Spikes** 6–20, pendulous on filiform peduncles, or upper spikes erect, sessile; upper 3–6 spikes male, sometimes mixed with female flowers, solitary or the lower geminate, 2–4 mm diameter, glumes hardly awned; remaining spikes female, usually with male flowers at the top, geminate, ternate or occasionally quinate, lowermost spikes 20–90 × 4–7 mm, upper spikes progressively smaller. **Glumes** (excluding awn) < utricles, narrow-ovate, obtuse, truncate or emarginate with a hispid awn of variable length, red-brown with a light brown, 3-nerved midrib, margins narrow, hyaline. **Utricles** 2.6–3.8 × 1.3–2.3 mm, ovoid to oblong, saccate, inflated or unequally compressed, 6–10-nerved on each face, olive green, becoming greenish brown or red-brown, soft, margins glabrous; beak very narrow, c. 0.2 mm long, orifice entire, rarely slightly bidentate. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** c. 1.5 mm long, in lower half of utricle, biconvex, orbicular-ovoid or obovoid, brown.

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Carex lessoniana* is allied to *C. coriacea* Hamlin, *C. ternaria* Boott, and *C. geminata* Schkuhr. From all these species it can be distinguished by the compact inflorescences, with wider, though smaller, initially erect spikelets (the basal few are always pendulous), and by distinctly beaked utricles. However, in some specimens the beak can be minute. *Carex ternaria* is unlikely to be confused because it is confined to the Chatham and Subantarctic islands outside the range of *C. lessoniana*. *Carex lessoniana* and *C. geminata* often overlap ecologically, although *C. lessoniana* is more common in wetter and/or more acidic habitats—such as peat bogs. Only rarely do the ranges of *C. lessoniana* and *C. coriacea* overlap, and then only in the south-eastern limits of its range.

## FLOWERING

October–December

## FRUITING

December–April

## LIFE CYCLE

Nuts surrounded by inflated utricles are dispersed by granivory and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and by the division of established plants. Although a wetland species *C. lessoniana* will grow well in most soils and moisture regimes. Does best in partial shade.

## ETYMOLOGY

**carex**: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.

**lessoniana**: Named after René Primevère Lesson who was a 19th century French botanist and surgeon

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 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. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-lessoniana/>