Celmisia spectabilis subsp. spectabilis

COMMON NAMES
Common mountain daisy, cotton plant

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

FLOWER COLOURS
White, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Woody-based herb forming mats or cushions 0.2-1.0 m diameter; with branchlets arising from a usually hidden simple or multicipital stock. Living leaves in rosettes at the tips of branchlets, the whole forming a cushion or mat. Leaf sheaths densely imbricate and compacted, forming a pseudostem. Leaf lamina 30-180 × 3-30 mm, (ratio of length to width 3.7-11); coriaceous, usually lanceolate-oblong to narrowly ovate; upper surface shining and sulcate: lower surface densely covered in soft felted pale buff to brown tomentum, midrib distinct; tip acute; margins entire and recurved, occasionally minutely toothed, with the lamina base distinctly angled; sheath green to deep purple. Petiole thin with evident veins. Scape densely clad in floccose white hairs, stout, up to 300 mm long, bracteate, monocephalous. Corolla of disc florets mostly glabrous, rarely hairy. Ray florets 40-100, ligulate, white. Disc florets 60-200, 5-9 mm long, funneliform: tube glabrous or with scattered uniseriate or biseriate hairs. Achene fusiform cylindric, grooved, 1.5-6.5 mm long, usually glabrous. Pappus hairs 5-9 mm long, barbellate.

SIMILAR TAXA
Distinguished from Celmisia spectabilis subsp. lanceolata by the broader shorter leaves (70-240 × 9-30 mm cf. 30-180 × 3-30 mm in subsp. spectabilis), pale buff to brown rather than almost white tomentum, and angled rather than attenuate leaf base. The sheath of subsp. lanceolata is greenish rather than green to deep purple, and the achenes usually sparsely in hairs rather than mostly glabrous (a feature of subsp. spectabilis). Celmisia spectabilis subsp. lanceolata is allopatric from subsp. spectabilis being known only from the eastern and northern Wairarapa. From subsp. magnifica, subsp. spectabilis differs by the broader and shorter leaves (70-290 × 10-45 mm cf. 30-180 × 3-30 mm in subsp. spectabilis); and by the cuneate to cuneate-truncate lamina base. Celmisia spectabilis subsp. magnifica occurs to the south of the range of subsp. spectabilis from the Big Ben Range and Acheron Valley just north of Rakaia River, south to the Hunters Hills and Mount Studholme.



Rangipo, Tongariro National Park. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Craigieburn Skifield, Canterbury. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North and South Islands: In the North Island from the Raukumara Range; South though the central volcanoes, Kaimanawa Mountains; Kaweka Range; north-west Ruahine Range and Tararua Range. In the South Island present in north-west Nelson and from northern Marlborough south to Rakaia River and Mathias River, Canterbury.

HABITAT
Alpine and subalpine grassland and herbfield rocky sites

GENUS
Celmisia

FAMILY
Asteraceae

AUTHORITY
Celmisia spectabilis Hook.f. subsp. spectabilis

SYNONYMS
Celmisia spectabilis var. angustifolia W. Martin; Celmisia spectabilis var. albomarginata W. Martin; Celmisia ruahinensis Colenso

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
October - February

FRUITING
November - May

CONTROL TECHNIQUES
Pappate cypselae are dispersed by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed. Celmisia spectabilis is one of the few Celmisia that is easily grown in most climates though it dislikes high humidity. Best grown in a moist, free draining soil, within some afternoon shade. Because it is highly variable some selection of wild forms suited to garden growing conditions is needed.

CULTIVATION
Occasionaly available from specialist native plant nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY
celmisia: Apparently named after Kelmis, one of Idaean Dactyls, a group of skilled mythical beings associated with the Mother Goddess Rhea in Greek mythology. Kelmis, whose name means ‘casting’, was a blacksmith and childhood friend of Zeus, son of Rhea and later king of the gods. In Ovid’s ‘Metamorphoses’, Kelmis is described as offending Zeus who turned him into adamant so he was as hard as a tempered blade
spectabilis: Notable

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to Celmisia in New Zealand

NVS CODE
CELSSP

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 108

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

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Given, D.R. 1984: A taxonomic revision of Celmisia subgenus Pelliculatae section Petiolatae (Compositae—Astereae). New Zealand Journal of Botany 22: 139-158.
Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11: 285-309

ATTRIBUTION
Description based on Given (1984)

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/celmisia-spectabilis-subsp-spectabilis/

PDF DATE
09 July 2026