Clematis foetida

COMMON NAMES
clematis

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Lianes & Related Trailing Plants - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Strongly sweet-scented liane with greenish-yellow flowers and 3 heart-shaped leaflets per leaf (juveniles with 9 leaflets per leaf). The species name is a misnomer, in that the flowers are sweetly perfumed, not 'foetid'.

Dog's Head Rock. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Heyward Point, Dunedin. Photographer: John Barkla, Date taken: 02/11/2012, Licence: CC BY.

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Evergreen woody climber with main stems to 6 m or more tall; trunk to 6 cm diam. at base; branchlets grooved, densely fulvous tomentose when young. Leaves 3-foliate (9 leaflets in juvenile plants), opposite; petioles c. 1.5-5(-9) cm long, stout, pilose-pubescent. Leaflets pubescent-pilose with fulvous hairs especially beneath, eventually becoming glabrate; on petiolules c. 5-10 mm long; midvein and secondary veins visible above, more obvious below; leaflet lamina (2.3-)5.5-9 x (1.8-)4.5-8(-12) cm, ovate, entire to sinuate, rarely crenately serrate or lobed, subcoriaceous, dark green, tip acute to obtuse, base truncate to subcordate, undersides paler. Subfloral leaves smaller. Juvenile leaves larger, thinner, irregularly lobed and sometimes serrate. Inflorescences unisexual, conspicuous, in axillary dichasial cymes, few-flowered, up to 8 cm long, inflorescence bracts ovate, acute to acuminate, paired, united, inserted above middle of peduncle. Flowers strongly scented. Male to 2.5 cm diam., sepals (5-)-6(-8), ovate-oblong, obtuse to subacute, imbricate, glabrous above, hairy beneath, 6-12(-23) x 2-5(-7) mm, yellow; stamens many, anthers 0.8-1.5 mm long, filaments glabrous., up to 1 cm long. Female 5-8 sepals, imbricate, yellow, glabrous above, pilose beneath, ovate, obtuse, 6-11 x 3-5 mm; staminodes few. Achenes hairy, elliptic, narrowed to apex, compressed, margin thickened and distinct, surface unornamented, (2.0-)2.2-3.0(-3.3) mm long, styles 15-28 cm long at fruiting, white-plumose for most of length, short hairs at base.

SIMILAR TAXA
Similar to other climbing yellow-or green-flowered clematis species that have large leaves. It can be distinguished most easily from *C. cunninghamii* by the weaker smell of that species (and also by the downy rather than hairy sepals and petals). From *C. forsteri* it can be distinguished by its young growing stems clad in yellow-brown hairs (glabrous in *C. forsteri*). *C. forsteri* has young leaves that are either glabrous underneath, or occ. with white (rather than brownish) hairs (the anthers are also larger in this species). The bipinnate juvenile leaves result in 9 leaflets per leaf in *C. foetida* whereas even seedling leaves of *C. forsteri* have 3 leaflets.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North and South Island. All except Taranaki in north, Nelson, Marlborough, Canterbury and eastern Otago in south.

HABITAT
lowland forests and especially forest margins.

GENUS
Clematis

FAMILY
Ranunculaceae

AUTHORITY
Clematis foetida Raoul

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September-November

FRUITING
November-January

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Pappate achenes are dispersed by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

ETYMOLOGY
clematis: From the Greek klema ‘vine’, alluding to the vine-like habit of many species
foetida: Stinking

NVS CODE
CLEFOE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 16

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

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient 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

Allan, H.H. 1961: Flora of New Zealand. Government Printer, Wellington.
Eagle, A. 2000: Eagle's complete trees and shrubs of NZ. Te Papa Press, Wellington.
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.
Webb, C.J; Sykes, W.R; Garnock-Jones, P.J. 1988: *Flora of NZ, Volume IV*. DSIR, Christchurch.
Webb, C.J. & Simpson, M.J.A. 2001: Seeds of NZ gymnosperms and dicotyledons. Manuka Press, Christchurch.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Allan (1961), Webb et al. (1988), Eagle (2000), Webb and Simpson (2001); also field experiences.

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/clematis-foetida/

PDF DATE

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