

Epilobium microphyllum

COMMON NAMES

willowherb

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tufted, creeping herb with woody bases, and numerous ascending, wiry stems, (these branching from base) 120-150(-280) mm long. Stems purple-black or black (rarely pale brown), initially sprawling, bifariously pubescent, hairs, short ±. Leaves opposite, rarely alternate toward flowers, distant, on very short petioles; coriaceous, glabrous, adaxially; lamina usually broadly elliptic to rotund, rarely elliptic, sometimes oblong, ovate-oblong, ovate to obovate, 2-8 × 1-3 mm, dark green often with purple-red margins, abaxially usually purple-red, margins faintly denticulate or entire, apex mucronulate. Flowers 3-4 mm diameter; floral tube 0.4-0.6 mm deep, strigillose outside; petals white, 2.0-2.9 × 0.8-1.9 mm. Capsules with conspicuous bands of strigillose hairs along the lines of dehiscence, thus appearing striped light and dark, rarely strigillose all over, 0.9-2.2 cm long; fruiting pedicel 0.2-1.6 cm long. Seed smooth.

SIMILAR TAXA

Other *Epilobium* species; particularly *E. brunnescens* from which it is easily distinguished by the purple-black, ascending, wiry stems, and dark purple-black, silvery striped fruiting capsules.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic: New Zealand: North, South and Chatham Islands. From about Kawhia and East Cape south, locally abundant around the Cook Strait region, thence mainly easterly in the South Island.

HABITAT

Gravelly or shingly riverbeds, flats and outwash plains; sea level to 1,200 m.

GENUS

Epilobium

FAMILY

Onagraceae

AUTHORITY

Epilobium microphyllum A. Rich

SYNONYMS

Epilobium microphyllum var. *prostratum* Petrie



Hurunui District. Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Photographer: Melissa Hutchison, Date taken: 18/10/2014, Licence: CC BY-NC.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December - February

FRUITING

October - March

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Minute pappate seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from rooted pieces and fresh seed. An attractive plant for an open spot, a rock garden, or as a pot plant. Prone to powdery mildew in humid climates.

WHERE TO BUY

Not Commercially available

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for December 2007](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

epilobium: From the Greek epi- 'upon' and lobos 'a pod', the flowers appearing to be growing on the seed pod.

microphyllum: Small leaf

NVS CODE

EPIMIC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NStr, RR, Sp 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

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

Fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Epilobium microphyllum* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/epilobium-microphyllum/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/epilobium-microphyllum/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026