

Epilobium nerteroides

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

Violet/Purple, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

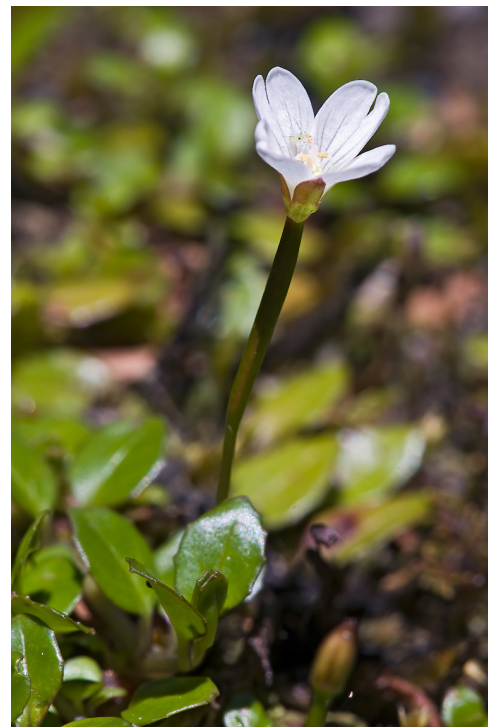
Loosely matted creeping perennial herb forming patches up to 0.4 m diameter; plants glabrous (rarely with a few strigulose hairs in lines decurrent from the margins of the petioles). Flowers arising individually from the leaf axils, the stems continuing to grow and root beyond the point where they are produced. Leaves opposite, dull pale to dark green, petioles distinct, 1-6 mm long; lateral veins of lamina (1-)2-3, on each side of the midrib, inconspicuous; lamina (3-)4-11 x (2-)0.3-0.8 mm, broadly elliptic to ovate, apex acute to obtuse, base rounded to acute, margins remotely serrulate or serrate, teeth (1-)2-8 on each side. Flowers erect. Ovaries (5-)8-13(-20) long, glabrous, green, borne on a glabrous pedicel (6-)9-19 mm long (the flowers usually falling before full pedicel elongation). Floral tube 5-11 x 11-15 mm. Sepals not keeled 1.0-3.1 x 0.7-1.1 mm, glabrous. Petals 2, 5-5.3 x 1.5-4.0 mm, white, rarely pale pink, the notch 0.6-1.0 mm deep. Anthers 0.4-0.7 x 0.2-0.5 mm, yellow; filaments of the longer stamens 0.8-2.0 mm long, those of shorter ones 0.7-1.5 mm long, both sets shedding pollen directly on the stigma before or after the flower opens. Style 1.0-2.1 mm, white; stigma 0.7-1.5 x 0.4-0.9 mm, white, clavate, surrounded by anthers at anthesis. Capsules 15-42 mm long, glabrous, borne on pedicels (27-)35-90(-150) mm long. Seeds 0.6-0.9 mm long, orange-brown, oblong-elliptic, elliptic or obovate, finely reticulate-papillate; coma 4-6 mm long, white (sometimes tinged orange), caducous.

SIMILAR TAXA

Epilobium nerteroides is most likely to be confused with *E. brunnescens*, with which it often grows. *Epilobium nerteroides* is distinguished from *E. brunnescens* by its narrower leaves, more open growth habit; subglabrous stems and glabrous ovaries; and by the flowers which fall before the elongation of the pedicel has ceased. Raven & Raven (1976) note that *E. nerteroides* grows on shaded mossy rocks and stream banks while *E. brunnescens* prefers open gravel in stream beds and other disturbed places. However, in the Central North Island at least it is not that uncommon to find both species growing together.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands.



Mangatainoka River, Tararua Range.
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:
02/01/2008, Licence: CC BY.



Mangatainoka River, Tararua Range. Jan 2008.
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:
02/01/2008, Licence: CC BY.

HABITAT

Coastal to subalpine. In riparian sites within forest and dense scrub growing on moss and liverwort encrusted rocks along watercourses.

GENUS

Epilobium

FAMILY

Onagraceae

AUTHORITY

Epilobium nerteroides A.Cunn

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September - March

FRUITING

November - May

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

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

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Prefers a damp, shaded site. Inclined to be weedy.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

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

nerteroides: Like Nertera, an unrelated plant

NVS CODE

EPINER

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

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR 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

Raven, P.H.; Raven, T.E. 1976: The genus *Epilobium* in Australasia. New Zealand DSIR Bulletin 216. Wellington, Government Printer.

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.; Simpson, M.J.A. 2011: Seeds of New Zealand Gymnosperms and Dicotyledons. Christchurch, Manuka Press.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by: P.J. de Lange (28 October 2012). Description adapted from Raven & Raven (1976) and Webb & Simpson (2001)

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

25 May 2026