Epilobium pubens

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, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Erect sparingly branched (up to 4 branches), slender perennial herb 150-700 mm tall; entire plant densely covered with erect glandular and eglandular hairs, the stems completely pubescent. Petiole 2-18 mm long, winged. Leaves opposite except in and near inflorescence where alternate; lateral veins prominent, 3-4 on each side of midrib; lamina 7-43 x 4-24 mm, dull green, narrowly obovate to broadly ovate, apex subacute to obtuse, base attentuate to rounded; margins serrulate, bearing 8-32 teeth. Inflorescence and flowers nodding. Pedicels 1-3 mm long. Ovaries 10-27 mm long, densely pubescent, with a fine covering of erect eglandular and glandular hairs. Floral tube 0.7-1.0 x 1.5-2.0 mm, internally glabrous or furnished with a few sparse hairs. Sepals 2.5-2.8 x 1.0-1.1 mm, not keeled, densely pubescent with mixtures of erect glandular/eglandular hairs. Petals 3.5-7.0 x 2.9-4.0 mm, white, notch 0.6-2.0 mm deep. Anthers 0.7-0.9 x 0.5-0.6 mm, yellow; filaments white, those of longer stamens 1.7-2.7 mm, shorter 0.8-1.2 mm. Style 2.0-2.8 mm, white, glabrous; stigma 1.5-2.6 x 0.6-0.8 mm, white, clavate. Capsule 2.9-5.3 mm long, densely covered with erect glandular and eglandular hairs; pedicel elongating to 15 mm long. Seeds 0.75-0.92 x 0.35-0.42 mm, dark brown, obovoid, papillose, coma 4-5 mm, detaching readily.



Pakuratahi Forks, Kaitoke Regional Park. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 16/12/2014, Licence: CC BY.



Simple and glandular hairs on stem and petioles. Pakuratahi Forks, Kaitoke Regional Park. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 16/12/2014, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Allied to Epilobium astonii (Allan) Raven et Engelhorn from which it differs by its slender scarcely branched, rather than much larger, compact, bushy, growth habit; shorter sepals (2.5-2.8 cf. 5.0-6.5 mm) and petals (3.5-7.0 cf. 7.3-13.0 mm); and by being a much more widespread species, occupying varied substrates and habitats from the coast to upper montane forest and subalpine scrub, rather than being restricted to predominantly greywacke rock within the subalpine to alpine zone of the main axial ranges of the North Island.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Three Kings, North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands.

HABITAT
Coastal to subalpine (1-1100 m a.s.l.) but mainly found in the coastal, lowland and lower montane zone. Favouring dry situations on rock outcrops, cliff faces, clay banks or similar semi-shaded to sunny habitats. Often under seral vegetation or under relatively open Kunzea ericoides (A.Rich.) Joy Thomps. s.l. dominated vegetation.

GENUS
Epilobium

FAMILY
Onagraceae

AUTHORITY
Epilobium pubens A.Rich.

SYNONYMS
Epilobium pubens var. strictum Allan

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September - April

FRUITING
October - June

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Minute pappate seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed. Not particularly attractive and inclined to become invasive.

WHERE TO BUY
Not commercially available.

ETYMOLOGY
epilobium: From the Greek epi- ‘upon’ and lobos ‘a pod’, the flowers appearing to be growing on the seed pod.
pubens: Downy

NVS CODE
EPIPUB

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, Sp 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 6 January 2008. Description adapted from Raven & Raven (1976) and Webb & Simpson (2001).

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/epilobium-pubens/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026