

Equisetum arvense

COMMON NAME

Horsetail

FAMILY

Equisetaceae

AUTHORITY

Equisetum arvense L.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

NVS CODE

EQUARV

HABITAT

Terrestrial. Bare land, riversystems especially silty, sandy and gravelly sites, streambanks.

FEATURES

Erect, colony-forming, summer-green perennial, primitive fern-ally to 10–80 cm. All aerial parts die back in winter. Extensive, deep, freely branching rhizomes with round tubers. Stems of 2 types. Sterile stems green, 10–80 cm long, 1–5 mm diam, jointed, hollow, ribbed or grooved, very rough to touch (containing silica), with lateral branches in whorls; leaves are 10 mm green sheaths. Resembles pine seedling. Fertile stems pale brown, shorter, joints larger, unbranched, with pale brown 14 mm sheaths; producing terminal cones; appearing in early spring before sterile stems and dying quickly after shedding spores. Cones conspicuous, 4–40 mm long. Spores seldom produced in NZ.

SIMILAR TAXA

Equisetum hyemale rough horsetail is very similar but rare; has slender, taller, very rough, asparagus-like spears with black rings, no leaves, no (occ few small) branches, cones on green stems. E. fluviatile (rare).

FLOWERING

N/A

FLOWER COLOURS

No flowers

YEAR NATURALISED

1922

ORIGIN

N temperate

ETYMOLOGY

equisetum: From the Latin equus 'horse' and setum 'bristle', the barren growths resembling horses' tails.

arvense: Growing in arable fields



Cone. Kowhai Park, Whanganui. Oct 1994.
Photographer: Colin Ogle



Mount Stewart, Manawatu. Oct 2008.
Photographer: Colin Ogle

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Accidental.

LIFE CYCLE COMMENTS

Perennial

REPRODUCTION

Reproducing by spores instead of seeds, and by rhizomes, to which are attached small tubers. (Wax, Fawcett, Isley eds. 1981). Fruiting heads contain masses of tiny pale greenish spores in small pine-cone like structure. Stems tough and wiry, hollow, jointed, and of two types: fertile, producing fruiting heads and having large, easily separable joints, not branched; Sterile or vegetative, having much smaller joints, with lateral branches in whorls around the main stem. Leaves on sterile stems only, in the form of cup shaped toothed sheaths at the joints (Wax, Fawcett, Isley eds. 1981).

Plant is dispersed by river systems, soil movement, humans (popular with herbalists).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Brownsey, P., Moss, T.C., Sneddon, B.V. Cone production in *Equisetum arvense*. Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin, 42: 16-21

Campbell, E.O. 1971. Notes on *Equisetum arvense* in New Zealand. Wellington Botanical Society Bulletin, 37: 51-53

de Lange, P.J. 1988. A new *Equisetum* species adventive in New Zealand. Auckland Botanical Society Journal, 43: 68-72.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/equisetum-arvense/>