

Equisetum arvense

COMMON NAMES

horsetail

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Ferns

FLOWER COLOURS

No flowers

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

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).

HABITAT

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

GENUS

Equisetum

FAMILY

Equisetaceae

AUTHORITY

Equisetum arvense L.

FLOWERING

N/A

YEAR NATURALISED

1922

ORIGIN

Arctic and temperate parts of the Northern Hemisphere.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Accidental.



Cone. Kowhai Park, Whanganui. Oct 1994.
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Mount Stewart, Manawatu. Oct 2008.
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LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Perennial. 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).

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

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

arvense: Growing in arable fields

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)

This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report [here](#).

NVS CODE

EQUARV

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/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026