Gahnia pauciflora

COMMON NAMES
cutting sedge

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Tufted, bright-green to yellow-green perennial sedge. **Rootstock** short and stout. **Culms** 0.6–1.8 m, 2–4 mm diameter (but up to 8 mm diameter at the base), occasionally with a single longitudinal groove. **Leaves** more or less equal in length to culms; lamina narrow-linear, up to 12 mm wide, bright green to yellow green, undersides harshly scabrid, margins more or less involute, strongly scabrid; sheaths up to 110 mm long, dull brown. **Panicle** arising well above leaves, 0.45–1.20 m long, drooping, branchlets comparatively few, about 3–5, in more or less distant clusters at each node, up to 200 mm long; secondary branchlets with few spikelets. **Spikelets** 2-flowered, 6–9 mm long, not clustered, shortly stalked or sessile. **Glumes** 6–10, dark brown, rather stiff; the lower 3–6 empty, their size increasing up the spikelet; upper 3–4 glumes enclosing fruit. **Stamens** 4–(5). **Style branches** 3–4. **Nut** 5.5–7.0 × 2.0–3.0 mm, brownish orange or sometimes yellow-cream, apex black, fusiform, subtrigonous, often grooved, subacute, narrowed to the width of the more or less persistent style-base, occasionally scaberulous; endocarp transversely grooved within.

SIMILAR TAXA
Distinguished from the other *Gahnia* species by the smaller overall stature, loosely tufted habit, panicles held well above the foliage, and dark brown glumes with the lower glumes much shorter than the upper glumes. The brownish-orange or yellow-cream nuts with dark black tips are also diagnostic, and when chewed impart a distinct vanilla flavour.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. North Island, South Island (where confined to Nelson and Marlborough).

HABITAT
Coastal to montane areas (up to 800 m a.s.l., possibly higher). usually in forest, more rarely in seral shrubland situations.

GENUS
Gahnia

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Gahnia pauciflora Kirk



Southern Tararua Range. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 21/06/2015, Licence: CC BY.



Stokes Valley, Lower Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 05/08/2006, Licence: CC BY.

SYNONYMS
Gahnia hectori Kirk; Gahnia scaberula Col.; Gahnia parviflora Col.; Gahnia exigua Col.; Gahnia multiglumis Col.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September–January

FRUITING
Fruits may be present throughout the year

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Florets are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Can be difficult to cultivate. The seed is difficult to germinate, and plants resent root disturbance and usually die if transplanted. However, considerable success has been achieved growing plants and/or germinating seed in untreated saw dust. Despite these problems this is an attractive species well worth attempting to grow. Once established it flourishes in a range of conditions but does best in full sun in a well drained or only seasonally wet soil.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACU: Facultative Upland
Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
gahnia: After Gahn
pauciflora: Few-flowered

NVS CODE
GAHPAU

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 Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Gardner RO. 1996. *Gahnia pauciflora* and *G. procera* and a note on *G. lacera*. *Auckland Botanical Society Journal 51*: 7–10.
Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.
Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 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 (30 October 2005). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/gahnia-pauciflora/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026