

Glyceria maxima

COMMON NAME

Floating sweetgrass, reed sweetgrass

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Glyceria maxima (Hartm.) Holumb.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

NVS CODE

GLYMAX

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Robust bright green grass, up to nearly 2 m tall, with creeping rhizomes that form large patches excluding all other plants. The tip of the leaf is boat-shaped. The seedheads are open and branched with many spikelets. The sheath has obviously cross veins.

DISTRIBUTION

Widely naturalised, abundant in most lowland parts of North Island, more scattered and absent from much of South Island.

HABITAT

Aquatic in drains and other slow flowing waterbodies, often forming dense floating mats in open frost-free areas. Also in swamps.

FEATURES

A perennial aquatic grass, to 1.8 m tall. It has an extensive root system up to c. 1 m deep, as well as sprawling underground stems. The leaves are shiny, hairless and mid-green in colour. They grow 30–60 cm above the water surface and are 0.7–2 cm wide. Leaves end in an abrupt point and their edges are rough to touch. The flower head is open, branched, and 15–45 cm long comprising a large number of spikelets that range from yellow to green in colour, with a purplish tinge. Flowering occurs in spring and summer. Small dark brown seeds are produced prolifically throughout summer and autumn.

SIMILAR TAXA

Glyceria declinata and *G. fluitans*. Both of the other *Glyceria* species present in New Zealand are much smaller (up to 50 cm tall) with narrow sparingly branched, distinctively brown seedheads and form low clumps as opposed to the tall erect clumps formed by reed sweetgrass.

FLOWERING

Spring/summer.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green

FRUITING

late spring-autumn



Glyceria maxima. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth



Glyceria maxima. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth

LIFE CYCLE

Perennial. Spread by seed and rhizomes. Prolific seed production. Seeds and rhizome via water flow. Contaminated diggers, livestock, soil movement, dumped vegetation, eel nets, boats and trailers all spread seed and fragments into new catchments.

YEAR NATURALISED

1906

ORIGIN

Europe

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Pasture species

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Can be controlled manually, mechanically or herbicidally depending on situation.

TOLERANCES

Tolerant to physical damage, grazing and pollutants. Intolerant of heavy frost and shade.

ETYMOLOGY

glyceria: From the Greek glykos 'sweet'.

ATTRIBUTION

Prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion et al (2012). Freshwater Pests of New Zealand. NIWA publication.

<http://www.niwa.co.nz/freshwater-and-estuaries/management-tools/identification-guides-and-fact-sheets/freshwater-pest-species>.

Coffey BT, Clayton JS (1988). New Zealand water plants: a guide to plants found in New Zealand freshwaters. Ruakura Agricultural Centre. 65pp.

Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.

Champion et al (2010). An illustrated guide to common grasses, sedges and rushes of New Zealand. NZ Plant Protection Society Inc, 182pp.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/glyceria-maxima/>