

Gunnera × cryptica

COMMON NAMES

Brazilian giant-rhubarb; giant rhubarb

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Giant rhubarb-like herb to 4 m wide or more, dying back to the large creeping stems over winter, with huge prickly leaves on erect petioles up to 2.5 m tall and large sausage-like flower spikes up to 1 m tall with tiny flowers and fruit covering the spike. The photos on this page that bear text boxes with 'G. manicata' should be interpreted as meaning 'Gunnera × cryptica'.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Giant, clump-forming, gynomonoeious, summergreen herb, with short, stout, horizontal rhizomes. Winter resting buds massive, to about 25cm long. Lvs to about 2.5 m high, rhubarb-like, but rough to the touch. Petiole to 1m long, studded with conic, short, often reddish, prickles. Inflorescence spike-like and up to 1 m long, with very small flowers. small round orange fruit 1.5-2 mm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

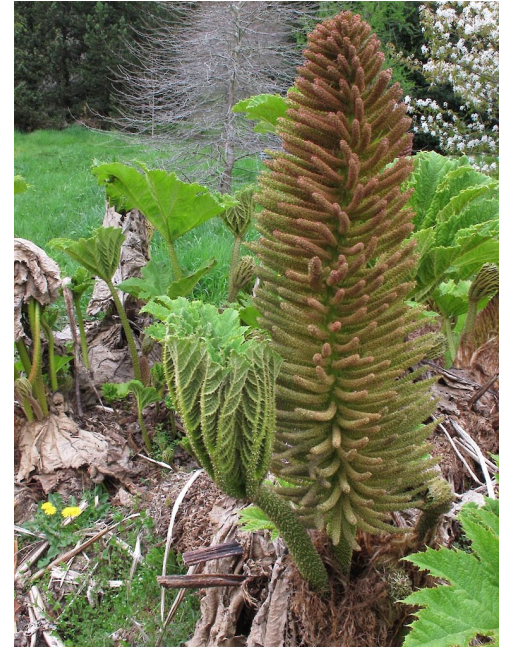
Very similar superficially to the much more common adventive and garden species, *G. tinctoria*. In the field the most obvious differences are the long narrow flower spikes of *Gunnera × cryptica* cf. the short thick spikes of *G. tinctoria*. The slender radiating inflor. branches are 9.5-11 cm long in *Gunnera × cryptica* cf. the thicker branches 4-7 cm X 5-7 mm in central part of panicle (Webb et al.1988). In *Gunnera × cryptica*, the upper leaf surface is dull green, not shiny; not or only slightly rugose or bullate (much flatter than in *G. tinctoria*); spines as for *G. tinctoria*, but much less prominent; whole surface somewhat rough but not harsh to touch. In *G. tinctoria* the upper leaf surface is dark green, somewhat shiny; markedly rugose and bullate; raised 'islands' between the veins bearing prominent blunt green spines with bulbous bases; sunken veins with sparse blunt yellow spines; whole surface very harsh to touch like coarse sandpaper. Separation of the two taxa in seedling stages seems barely possible.

HABITAT

In cultivation requires wet conditions - pond and stream margins, bogs. Seedlings sometimes appear near planted plants in NZ but have been seen 'escaped' in e.g. the Isle of Mull in 2013 (pers.obs. C C Ogle)

GENUS

Gunnera



Dunedin Botanic Garden. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Dunedin Botanic Garden. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

FAMILY

Gunneraceae

AUTHORITY

Gunnera x cryptica J.M.H.Shaw

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Shaw et al. (2022) have shown that all known plants in cultivation outside of Brazil, and which were previously named as *G. manicata*, are actually hybrids between that species and *G. tinctoria*

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Flowering spikes longer and narrower than in *G. tinctoria* (see above)

FRUITING

Each spike is capable of producing

YEAR NATURALISED

2003

ORIGIN

Southern Brazil

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

As at 2016, *Gunnera x cryptica* appears to produce seedlings infrequently in the wild and even in gardens, cf. *G. tinctoria* which can be prolific and a major invasive species in NZ indigenous plant communities.

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

seed; division of rhizome.

ETYMOLOGY

gunnera: Named after Bishop Gunner, a Swedish botanist

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Julian M. H. Shaw*, Dawn Edwards, John David, 2022. British & Irish Botany 4(3): 364-384, 2022 A new spontaneous hybrid in *Gunnera* subgenus Panke (Gunneraceae) widespread in the British Isles, with notes on the typification of *G. manicata*

Webb, CJ; Sykes, WR; Garnock-Jones, PJ 1988 Flora of NZ Vol.3. Botany Division, DSIR, NZ

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/gunnera-cryptica/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026