

Gunnera tinctoria

COMMON NAMES

Chilean rhubarb

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Giant rhubarb-like herb, dying back to the large creeping stems over winter, with huge prickly leaves 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.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Red/Pink

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Giant, clump-forming, gynomonocious, 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 identifiable plant. Some specimens in cultivation have been called *G. manicata*, perhaps in error but perhaps to avoid the prohibition on growing *G. tinctoria*. These always have a much more lax flowering spike. But otherwise are very similar dimensions to *G. manicata*.

DISTRIBUTION

Very scattered throughout New Zealand, but commonest in high rainfall areas, e.g. South Taranaki, Westland

HABITAT

Margins of wetlands, damp cliffs and banks, often in light shade.

GENUS

Gunnera

FAMILY

Gunneraceae

AUTHORITY

Gunnera tinctoria (Molina) Mirbel

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No



Invading a slip face, Catlins rainforest, Southland. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 25/11/2021, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Invading a slip face, Catlins rainforest, Southland. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 25/11/2021, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWERING

October and November

FRUITING

Autumn

YEAR NATURALISED

1968

ORIGIN

Chile to Colombia in the Andes

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental

TOLERANCES

Extremely tolerant of salt, wide variety of soil conditions, very wet swampy sites to dry banks.

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

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

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Perennial. Gynodioecious, i.e. has female and hermaphrodite flowers on the same plant. Reproduces by seed, and massive rhizomes. Huge amounts of seed with high viability is produced. No information on seed longevity. Seed spread by birds and water, rhizomes by deliberate plantings, soil movement.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

gunnera: Named after Bishop Gunner, a Swedish botanist

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

GUNTIN

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Webb, C.J.; Sykes, W.R.; Garnock-Jones, P.J. (1988). Flora of New Zealand Volume 4: Naturalised pteridophytes, gymnosperms, dicotyledons. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

Popay et al (2010). An illustrated guide to common weeds of New Zealand, third edition. NZ Plant Protection Society Inc, 416pp.

Williams, PA; Ogle, CC, Timmins, SM; La Cock, G; Clarkson, J (2005). Chilean rhubarb (*Gunnera tinctoria*); biology, ecology and conservation impacts in New Zealand.

DOC Research & Development Series no.210. Dept of Conservation, Wellington.

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA). Features description from Webb et al., (1988).

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

08 June 2026