

Helminthotheca echioides

COMMON NAMES

Oxtongue

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Yellow

SIMILAR TAXA

The stem and leaf indumentum of oxtongue (*Helminthotheca echioides* (L.) Holub) has 2-, 3-, 4- or 5-hooked anchor hairs and the hairs of the leaves arise from a conspicuous swollen base. The involucral bracts of the flowers are in two rows, with the five outer involucral bracts ovate to cordate, and the apex of the inner bracts feather-like. Unlike our indigenous oxtongue (*Picris* spp.) the achenes of the introduced oxtongue (*H. echioides*) are dimorphic: the outer achenes, are larger, white, and pilose hairy; the inner shorter, dark-brown and glabrous. In our indigenous oxtongues (*Picris* spp.) the achenes are never heteromorphic.

HABITAT

A common weed of waste land, pasture, urban areas, and forest margins. Coastal to montane.

GENUS

Helminthotheca

FAMILY

Asteraceae

AUTHORITY

Helminthotheca echioides (L.) Holub

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Year round in warm climates - otherwise August - May

FRUITING

Present year round in warm climates otherwise October - July

YEAR NATURALISED

1869

ORIGIN

S. Europe, S.W Asia, N. Africa - long known in New Zealand as *Picris echioides* L.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Probably accidental



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Helminthotheca echioides. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

TOLERANCES

Moderately drought and cold tolerant.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Biennial to short-lived perennial. Sometimes annual in harsh conditions. Reproduces exclusively by seed. Seed is dimorphic - outer achenes are white and larger than the brown inner achenes. Seed is probably long-lived as this species turns up in agricultural grassland soil that has been recently ploughed. Dispersed by wind and also by attachment to clothing, wool and other fibres.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

UPL: Obligate Upland

Rarely is a hydrophyte, almost always in uplands (non-wetlands).

NVS CODE

HELECH

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/helminthotheca-echioides/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026