Houttuynia cordata

COMMON NAMES
houttuynia

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS
White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Dense, deciduous (semi-evergreen in warm areas) groundcover herb to 1m. Slender couch-like rhizomes. Stems creeping and semi-ascending. leaves heart-shaped, up to 7 cm long, usually variegated cream, bronze, scarlet and green, soon reverting to green. Peppery scent when crushed. Flowerhead a small spike with minute flowers and 4 white bracts (petals) at the base, Dec-Feb. Usually dies back to rootstock over winter.

SIMILAR TAXA
Ivy has similar leaves but woody stems. 3 coloured leaves (green, red, creamy) inmost commonly cultivated form. Leaves are unpleasant-smelling.

HABITAT
Terrestrial. Wetlands, gardens, freshwater margins, damp ground, forest, shrubland and fenland.

GENUS
Houttuynia

FAMILY
Saururaceae

AUTHORITY
Houttuynia cordata Thunb.

FLOWERING
December, January, February

ORIGIN
Japan South to mountains of Nepal and Java.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornamental plant

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Reproduces by rhizome fragments or possibly seeds.

ETYMOLOGY
houttuynia: Named for Dr Maarten Houttuyn (1720 – 1798), a Dutch botanist.



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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.

NVS CODE

HOUCOR

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Johnson, A. T. and Smith, H. A (1986). Plant Names Simplified: Their pronunciation, derivation and meaning. Landsman Bookshop Ltd: Buckenhill, UK.

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/houttuynia-cordata/

PDF DATE

25 May 2026