Iris foetidissima

COMMON NAMES
stinking iris

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Monocots

FLOWER COLOURS
Brown, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Clump-forming perennial to 80 cm. Rhizomes red-brown, up to 15 mm diameter. Leaves leathery, dark greed, broad, sword shaped, 15-25 mm x 60-100 cm, foul smelling when crushed. Flowering stem 60-80 cm, erect. Flowers up to 10 cm diameter, dull yellow with greenish-brown markings (Occasionally brownish-purple). Seed capsule green, 3-sided, 5 cm long, splitting issuing many scarlet round seeds, 5 mm diameter.

SIMILAR TAXA
The leaves have an unpleasant odour when crushed and this is useful in separating I. foetidissima from other Iris species. It can also be recognised by the drab flowers and conspicuous scarlet seeds exposed in the persistent capsule.

HABITAT
Terrestrial. A plant of coastal and lowland habitats (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). A plant of low forest, scrub and forest margin communities, also found in waste places (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995).

GENUS
Iris

FAMILY
Iridaceae

AUTHORITY
Iris foetidissima L.

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
November, December

YEAR NATURALISED
1945

ORIGIN
Europe & N Afr

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornamental

Iris foetidissima. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Iris foetidissima. Photographer: Richard Hursthouse, Licence: CC BY.

TOLERANCES
The plant prefers high rainfall and is highly tolerant of shade (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). After grazing the plant resprouts from the rhizome (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Requires medium soil fertility (Atkinson 1997).

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Perennial, reproduces by seed and vegetativeily through rhizomatous resprouting (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seed is dispersed by birds and water(Timmins & MacKenzie 1995).

POISONOUS PLANT
The orange seed (which can be seen when the fruits open) are poisonous.

ETYMOLOGY
iris: From the Greek iris 'rainbow', presumably in reference to the many colours of the flowers (Johnson and Smith, 1986).
foetidissima: Vile smelling

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
IRIFOE

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/iris-foetidissima/

PDF DATE
25 May 2026