Isolepis cernua var. cernua

COMMON NAMES
slender clubrush

BIOSTATUS
Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Variable in size, in dense tufts or with a shortly branched ascending rhizome. **Culms** 20–200 mm long, usually c. 0.5 mm. diameter or less, but occasionally up to 1 mm diameter. **Leaves** 1–4 or 0, ± = culms, or much < culms, c. 0.5 mm wide, or often reduced to shortly mucronate sheaths; sheaths dark red-purple at the base, lighter brown towards the truncate orifice. **Inflorescence** of 1–(2–3) spikelets; subtending bract ± = or usually slightly > spikelets, 3–25 mm long, setaceous or leaf-like, caducous. **Spikelets** 2.0–5.0 × 1.0–2.5 mm, elliptical, obtuse, almost white, or green, or with red-brown markings. **Glumes** 1–2 mm. long, broadly ovate, only slightly concave with keel not prominent, obtuse, green to very pale straw coloured, or with red-brown markings at the sides, margins entire, membranous, rounded towards the tip, or with the keel at tip of glume somewhat thickened and ± excurrent, lateral nerves conspicuous. **Hypogynous bristles** 0. **Stamens** 3, rarely 2 or 1 in occasional glumes. **Style-branches** 3. **Nut** us. slightly < 1 mm. long, but occasionally slightly > 1 mm., c. 0.5 mm. wide, obovoid or occasionally elliptical-obovoid, plano-convex, or subtrigonous and obtusely angled at the back, rounded at the tip and sharply apiculate, red-brown or dark grey at maturity, minutely but very distinctly reticulate.

Wainuioimata River mouth. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 26/12/2006, Licence: CC BY.

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

SIMILAR TAXA
An extremely variable species, *Isolepis cernua* is generally easily recognised by its preference for coastal habitats (but it can occur well inland as well); leaves usually < culms; stamens mostly 3 per glume, trigonous red-brown or dark brown nut; and by the glume margins and nut with are rounded toward the apex.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. New Zealand. Almost cosmopolitan but apparently absent from S.E. Asia.

HABITAT
Mostly coastal on damp sand, or peat within sand flats, dune slacks, fringing lagoons and slow flowing brackish water, on coastal rocks and boulder beaches. More rarely inland around lake margins, and in peat bogs (especially restiad bogs).

GENUS
Isolepis

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Isolepis cernua (Vahl) Roem. & Schult. var. cernua

SYNONYMS
Isolepis pygmaea (Vahl) Kunth; Scirpus cernuus Vahl; Fimbristylis pygmaeum Vahl

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
August–December (may be present throughout the year)

FRUITING
October–May (may be present throughout the year)

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Nuts are dispersed by water and possibly granivory and attachment (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and by division of whole plants. Once established rather tolerant of a range of conditions but flourishes best in full sun in a permanently damp soil. An attractive pot plant.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
isolepis: From the Greek isos (equal) and lepis (scale)
cernua: Drooping

NVS CODE
ISOCVC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 48

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland" Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.
Otago: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened Help
The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Otago conservation status information is sourced from the "Conservation Status of Indigenous Vascular Plants in Otago, 2025" Jarvie S et al. (2025) report.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Johnson AT, Smith HA. 1986. Plant Names Simplified: Their pronunciation, derivation and meaning. Landsman Bookshop Ltd, Buckenhill, UK.
Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.
Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11*: 285–309.

ATTRIBUTION

Description from Moore and Edgar (1970).
Some of this factsheet information is derived from Flora of New Zealand Online and is used under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand licence.

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/isolepis-cernua-var-cernua/

PDF DATE

07 June 2026