

Landoltia punctata

COMMON NAMES

purple-backed duckweed

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Monocots

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Tiny, surface floating aquatic plant with bright green plate-like leaves (5 x 3 mm) that have a purple underside and more than one root per leaf.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Platelets usually with bright green upper sides, red-purple undersides and two or more roots per platelet. The leaves are generally thicker than those of *Lemna*. Flowers are small enclosed in a spathe within a lateral pouch on the platelet. Seeds are ribbed in a network with a prominent operculum.

SIMILAR TAXA

The native *Lemna disperma* is very similar but the root does not arise from a winged sheath. *Landoltia* has two or more roots arising from each platelet. Watermeal (*Wolffia australiana*) is much smaller and lacking roots. *Azolla* is an aquatic fern and has scale like leaves that overlap.

DISTRIBUTION

Widespread and abundant in the North Island and northern South Island.

HABITAT

Clear, still fertile water including, troughs, dams, drains and backwaters.

GENUS

Landoltia

FAMILY

Araceae

AUTHORITY

Landoltia punctata (G. Meyer) Les & DJ Crawford

SYNONYMS

Spirodela punctata (G. Meyer) C. Thompson

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November to March



Landoltia (platelets with dark margins), *Lemna disperma* (smaller), *Wolffia australiana* (tiny), farm pond near Waverley. Apr 2012. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Roots and underside of plant. Meola Creek, Auckland (from material collected by Peter de Lange). Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 02/02/2014, Licence: CC BY.

FRUITING

January to March

YEAR NATURALISED

1929

ORIGIN

Asia, Polynesia and Australia

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Probably a contaminant of ornamental pond or aquarium plants.

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Difficult to control once established.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

These tiny plants are readily spread by waterfowl.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

punctata: From the Latin punctatus 'dotted', referring to a pattern of small round dots

NVS CODE

LANPUN

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.

Aston, H (1977). Aquatic plants of Australia. Melbourne University Press, 367PP.; Popay et al (2010). An illustrated guide to common weeds of New Zealand, third edition. NZ Plant Protection Society Inc, 416pp.

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/landoltia-punctata/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026