

Lemna disperma

COMMON NAMES

common duckweed

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Monocots

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Platelets up to 6 x 4 mm, suborbicular to elliptic-obovate, nearly symmetric, bearing 1-2 vegetative buds per platelet; dorsal surface bright green to yellow-green, faintly 3-veined; ventral surface paler and often tinged with red or purple, flat to slightly convex. Root single, peltately attached, rather long for size of plant, proximal portion lying in a fine furrow in the platelet tissue; root-cap conspicuous. Inflorescence in lateral pouch, partly enclosed by spathe; spathe opened at apex. Ovule solitary. Fruit ovoid, wingless, projecting beyond the pouch margin. Seed obovate, flattened, smooth; operculum prominent, more or less flattened.

SIMILAR TAXA

Could only be confused with the introduced *Landoltia punctata* (also known as *Spirodela oligorrhiza* (Kurz) Hegelm) which differs by its larger size, platelets whose ventral surface is usually dark purple (rather than pale green), and which bear 2 or more (rather than one) roots.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands (Uncommon on Stewart and Chatham Islands). Otherwise cosmopolitan.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane (up to 400 m a.s.l.). In still, fertile water usually in sunny situations (rarely in shade). Often growing intermixed with *Landoltia punctata* (G.Mey.) Les et D.J.Crawford, *Azolla filiculoides* Lam., *Wolffia australiana* (Benth.) Hartog et Plas, *Ricciocarpos natans* (L.) Corda and *Riccia fluitans* L.

GENUS

Lemna

FAMILY

Araceae

AUTHORITY

Lemna disperma Hegelm.

SYNONYMS

Lemna minor L. has been applied, incorrectly, for New Zealand plants



Lemna disperma, *Landoltia punctata* (larger with dark margins), *Wolffia australiana* (tiny), farm pond near Waverley. Apr 2012.

Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.



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

TAXONOMIC NOTES

New Zealand plants have been referred to *L. minor* L. which is a widespread northern hemisphere species which little resembles the New Zealand plant and may not even be here (indeed Landolt (2011) states that only *L. disperma* is present in New Zealand, and that *L. minor* is a very uncommon naturalised species in Australia). Irrespective New Zealand plants are cytologically variable and there is still some doubt as to the whether *L. disperma* is indeed the most appropriate name for some or all of them. Further research is needed.

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November - February

FRUITING

December - April

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown in a sunny site within a pond, or similar still or slowly flowing body of water. An excellent aquarium plant. However, can be invasive in some situations, especially in nutrient rich water. An important food for many invertebrates, tadpoles, fish and some dabbling birds

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

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

NVS CODE

LEMDIS

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

$2n = 20, 30, 42, 40$

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient | Qualifiers: DPR, SO 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 Data Deficient 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

Landolt, E. 2011: Lemnaceae Pp. 274-282. Flora of Australia 39. Alismatales to Arales. ABRS/CSIRO, Melbourne, Australia.

Moore, L.B.; Edgar, E. 1970: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. II. Government Printer, Wellington.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P. J. de Lange 31 August 2007.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): Lemna disperma Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lemna-disperma/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lemna-disperma/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026