

Lepidium amissum

COMMON NAMES

Waitakere scurvy grass

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Extinct

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

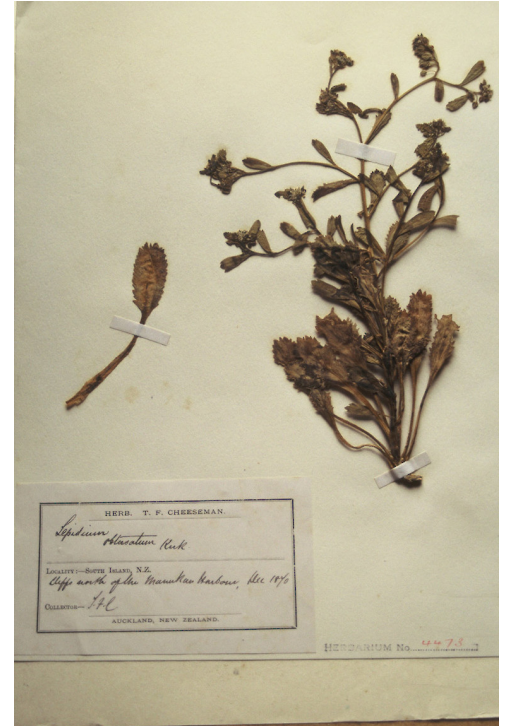
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

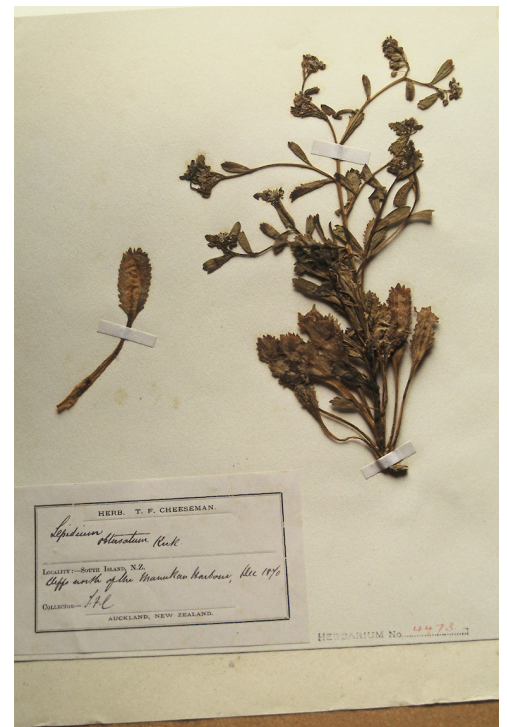
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Perennial herb arising from stout tap-root. Plants with untidy, suberect to sprawling, leafy branches. Leaves dark green, with deeply toothed margins (probably smelling of cress when crushed). Inflorescences at branch tips, Flowers white with four stamens. Fruits circular, apices deeply notched, splitting cleanly into two valves, seeds orange-brown or brown.



Cheeseman, Manukau Heads. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Cheeseman, Manukau Heads. Photographer: Peter J de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Glabrous, suberect, sparingly branched, succulent, perennial, herb forming open patches up to c. 1 m diameter. Rootstock stout, woody, exposed portion rough, covered in old dead stem and rosette-leaf remnants admixed with actively growing stems. Stems arching, widely spreading, possibly with apices weakly ascendent, succulent, mature stems woody, 200–300 × 3–6 mm, densely leafy near base, leaves more widely spaced along upper stems. Leaves glabrous, coriaceous, probably succulent, dark green, planar, variable size and shape. Rosette leaves persistent at fruiting 71.7–95.2 × 12.4–23.2 mm, spatulate; apex, truncate, praemorse, with 3–8 deeply incised teeth; margin coarsely and often irregularly incised or dentate, often weakly bidentate, with 24–36 pairs of teeth; teeth up to 4.8 mm deep, irregular in size, protruding beyond leaf outline; base narrowly attenuate to cuneate, ± decurrent, petiole distinct, 43.4–55.2 × 1.4–2.3 mm long, slightly winged, or not, channelled. Lower stem leaves similar to rosette leaves, apparently persistent, widely spaced, gradually decreasing in size toward inflorescence; petioles distinct, slightly winged or not. Upper stem leaves much reduced; lamina 10.3–27.5 × 3.4–7.6 mm, lanceolate, narrowly oblanceolate, lanceolate to narrowly oblanceolate-spathulate to obovate obdeltoid, apex truncate, with 3–4 prominent teeth, margins prominently toothed in upper third of lamina with 4–6 deeply incised pairs of teeth (rarely entire except for apex), base cuneate to broadly cuneate; petiole distinct or indistinct, up to 6 mm long when present, channelled. Inflorescence racemose, terminal and lateral, conspicuous, sparingly leafy and unfettered by associated vegetative leafy stems; racemes 22–68 mm long, rachis 0.9–1.6 mm diam., glabrous; pedicels 2.8–3.2 mm long at flowering, erecto-patent, elongating somewhat after anthesis, glabrous. Flowers 4.3–4.6 mm diameter. Sepals 4, saccate, overlapping at base, green, apex obtuse, margin white, shape and size dimorphic; lateral sepals 2.2–2.9 × 2.1–3.0 mm, suborbicular, mostly glabrous, sometimes sparsely hairy, hairs 0.2–0.4 mm long, caducous; median sepals 1.9–2.9 × 1.5–1.7 mm, broadly elliptic to obovate, abaxial surface glabrescent, sparsely hairy, hairs 0.2–0.4 mm long, caducous. Petals white, 1.3–1.8 × 1.3–1.8 mm, erect, claw minute, 0.2–0.3 mm; limb orbicular, apex obtuse. Stamens 4, ± equal lengths, 1.2–1.8 mm long, base 0.6–1.0 mm wide; anthers 0.6–0.8 mm long, yellow, pollen yellow. Ovary 1.3–1.8 × 1.3–1.7 mm, broadly ovate to suborbicular green, apex distinctly notched; style 0.3–0.5 mm long, cylindrical below, spreading at apex; stigma 0.5–0.6 mm diameter. Nectaries 4, green, 0.12–0.14 × c. 0.09 mm, narrow oblong, apex obtuse. Silicles 3.4–4.5 × 2.9–3.9 mm, broadly ovate, oval to obovate, apex prominently notched, valves yellow-green (in dried specimens), glabrous, slightly winged; style 0.2–0.5 mm long, not or only slightly exerted. Seeds 2.0–2.7 × 1.8–2.0 mm, obovate, broadly obovate, brown to orange-brown, not winged.

SIMILAR TAXA

Lepidium amissum was previously included within another extinct species *Lepidium obtusatum*. From that species *L. amissum* differs by the non-rhizomatous, suberect growth habit; arching, sparingly leafy stems; long persistent, deeply, and sharply incised rosette and lower stem leaves; upper stem leaves which are lanceolate, narrowly oblanceolate, to narrowly obdeltoid and mostly prominently toothed, with up to 6 pairs of deeply incised teeth, and with a truncate apex bearing 3–4 prominent teeth. The inflorescences of *L. amissum* are larger, only sparsely leafy when mature, and without associated vegetative stems. The silicles are smaller than those of *L. obtusatum*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand. North Island (Waitakere Ranges Coastline)

HABITAT

Coastal cliffs. Exact habitat preferences unknown (see de Lange et al. 2013)

THREATS

Extinct. The reasons for the extinction of *Lepidium amissum* are not clear. The species is known only from four herbarium sheets, one of these collected in 1870 and the other three portions of the same gathering made in 1917. The species was evidently already very uncommon when it was “discovered” by Thomas Cheeseman, who it seems unwittingly contributed to its extinction. Much of the coastline from where this species was said to grow was grossly modified during the late 1800s and early 1900s and this may have contributed to this species demise.

GENUS

Lepidium

FAMILY

Brassicaceae

AUTHORITY

Lepidium amissum de Lange et Heenan

SYNONYMS

None (first described in 2013)

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

December - January

FRUITING

December - January

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Unknown. Species is extinct.

ETYMOLOGY

lepidium: Scale-shaped (pods)

amissum: From amissus - meaning missing, in reference to the loss through extinction of this species from our indigenous flora (see de Lange et al. 2013)

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Extinct

2012 | Extinct

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Extirpated | Qualifiers: TL, RE 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.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

de Lange, P.J.; Heenan, P.B.; Houlston, G.; Rolfe, J.R.; Mitchell, A.D. 2013: New *Lepidium* (Brassicaceae) from New Zealand. *Phytokeys* 24:1-147pp. , doi: [10.3897/phytokeys.24.4375](https://doi.org/10.3897/phytokeys.24.4375).

ATTRIBUTION

P.J. de Lange (15 August 2013). Description from de Lange et al. (2013) - see references for free download link for that paper.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lepidium-amissum/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026