

Lepidium flexicaule

COMMON NAMES

coastal cress

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: CD, DPT, EF, PD, TO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Decumbent, perennial, fleshy, tap-rooted herb producing 1-8(-many) trailing stems up to 400 mm long. Stems woody near base, square in cross-section, with angles finely denticulate. Basal leaves 30-150 x 10-45 mm. dark green to yellow-green, glabrous, pinnatifid to pinnate, narrow-obovate or narrow-oblong; pinnae in 2-8 pairs, coarsely to bluntly toothed. Stem leaves 10-30 x 3-10 mm, dark green or yellow-green, glabrous or sparsely and minute hairy, narrow- or broadly-obovate, spatulate, to linear-lanceolate, toothed or crenate at apex, cuneate or abruptly narrowed at base, margins finely papillate-denticulate. Racemes leaf-opposed, 10-40 mm, rachis and pedicels glabrous or sparsely hairy. Sepals green, 1 x 0.5 mm, glabrous or sparsely hairy. Petals < sepals, white. Stamens 2. Silicles 3-4 x 2-3 mm, ovate, crowded. Style = notch, free from narrow wing, valves glabrous. Seeds 1-1.5 mm, brown, narrow-ovoid.

SIMILAR TAXA

It is most often confused with winter cress *Lepidium didymum* L. and *L. squamatum* Forssk. which have similar, though more strongly pungent, foliage and seed capsules, and grow in much the same, though usually more modified habitats. Both differ from *L. flexicaule* in that their seed capsules are net-veined and/or covered in warty protuberances, and when they split they come away as two entire halves, never splitting by the valves and never leaving behind a replum.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. In New Zealand known from historic records around Auckland, Coromandel, the firth of Thames, and Wellington. In 2003 it was discovered at one site on the South Taranaki Coast. In the South Island, *L. flexicaule* is known from Cape Farewell to Greymouth. The species was also gathered on the Chatham Islands in the 1860s. It was rediscovered there, at one site, in 2004. Also present on the west coast of Tasmania, Australia. It is not considered common in Tasmania and it may well be threatened there (A. Buchan pers. comm.).

HABITAT

A coastal species usually found in coastal turfs, but also on rock stacks, outcrops, headlands, cliff faces and amongst boulders; often but not always in association with nesting or roosting seabird sites, and seal haul outs.

THREATS

Habitat loss through weed encroachment and development, browsing; susceptible to many of the pests and diseases of introduced brassicas, e.g., cabbage white butterfly, aphids, snails, white rust and diamondback moth.



In cultivation ex north-west Nelson.
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:
16/02/2009, Licence: CC BY.



In cultivation ex north-west Nelson.
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:
16/02/2009, Licence: CC BY.

GENUS

Lepidium

FAMILY

Brassicaceae

AUTHORITY

Lepidium flexicaule Kirk

SYNONYMS

Lepidium incisum Banks et Sol. ex Hook.f., Nasturtium neozelandicum Kuntze

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Recent collections from the Chatham Islands lack the marginal stem and leaf denticles. Denticles are also decidedly infrequent in Australian material.

Story about rediscovery on the West Coast in [Trilepidea Issue 30](#) (May 2006)

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Flowering occurs from November to January.

FRUITING

Fruiting from December to March.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Mucilaginous seeds are dispersed by attachment and possibly wind and water (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed. Can be grown from cuttings but these can be tricky to strike. *L. flexicaule* forms compact mats and the stems die back to the root stock in winter, resprouting in spring. It is less susceptible to diseases than *L. oleraceum* Sparrm., or *L. banksii* Kirk. In cultivation *L. flexicaule* readily hybridises with *L. banksii* and *L. oleraceum*, so it should be planted well away from those species. It does best in a permanently damp, fertile soil, in full sun.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for May 2006](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

lepidium: Scale-shaped (pods)

NVS CODE

LEPFLE

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: CD, EF, TO

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: CD, EF, TO

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CD, EF

2004 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient | Qualifiers: DPR, TO, TL 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).

David A. Norton and Peter J. de Lange. 1999. Coastal cress (Nau) recovery plan. Threatened Species Recovery Plan 26. Department of Conservation

Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora.

Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11: 285-309

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 25 August 2008. Description subsequently published in de Lange et al. (2013).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

08 June 2026