

Lepidium juvencum

COMMON NAMES

scurvy grass

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, DPS, DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Perennial, strongly aromatic (smelling of cress) herb. Plants with sparse, straggling, sprawling, leafy branches. Leaves dark green, margins serrated apices and bases often drawn out. Inflorescences at branch tips, Flowers white with four stamens. Fruits elliptic-rhomboid to orbicular-rhomboid apices very slightly notched, splitting cleanly into two valves, seeds brown or orange-brown.

FLOWER COLOURS

White



Foliage of *Lepidium juvencum* in cultivation. Jan 2010. Photographer: Peter B. Heenan, Licence: CC BY-NC.



(From left to right) basal-, mid- and upper-stem leaves of *Lepidium juvencum*. Photographer: Peter B. Heenan, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tap-rooted, strongly pungent smelling, perennial herb. Growth habit open, straggly, up to 50 cm tall. Stems usually decumbent to sprawling, slender, flexible, sparse; mature stems woody, 100–1000 × 8–12 mm, often devoid of foliage on middle and lower parts of stems; new stems 100–400 × 3–4 mm, leafy, glabrous. Leaves glabrous, subcoriaceous, green, often undulate, rosette and stem leaves usually withering, variable in size and shape. Leaves of young and vigorous plants and stems: lamina 37–87 × 12–32 mm, elliptic, obovate or elliptic-oblongate; apex truncate to obtuse, usually with 2–3 prominent teeth and often appearing irregular; margin singly crenate, with 4–19 pairs of teeth; teeth up to 1.5 mm deep, not overlapping; base attenuate to cuneate, tapering to a distinct or indistinct petiole; petiole up to 23.0 × 2.0–5.0 mm, or sessile. Leaves of mature plants and cauline stems: lamina 10–60 × 3–21 mm, elliptic, elliptic-oblongate, obovate to elliptic-obovate; apex subacute, truncate or obtuse, usually with 2–3 prominent teeth and often appearing irregular; margin singly crenate in upper and/or lower half, with 4–19 pairs of teeth; teeth up to 1.3 mm deep, not overlapping; base attenuate to cuneate, tapering to distinct or indistinct petiole, or sessile. Inflorescence terminal and lateral, racemose, 10–60 mm long, rachis 1.0–1.3 mm diameter, glabrous; pedicels 4.0–6.0 mm long, erecto-patent, usually glabrous although lower pedicels occasionally sparsely hairy on adaxial surface. Flowers 4.0–5.0 mm diameter. Sepals 4, 1.3–1.5 mm long, saccate, overlapping at base, green, apex obtuse, margin white, shape dimorphic; lateral sepals broad, 1.1–1.5 mm diameter, orbicular, abaxial surface often hairy, hairs 0.1–0.5 mm long; median sepals narrow, 0.9–1.2 mm diameter, broadly elliptic, glabrous. Petals white, 2.0–2.4 × 1.1–1.5 mm, spreading, claw 0.6–1.0 mm long; limb broadly elliptic to orbicular, apex obtuse to rounded. Stamens 4(–5); filaments 1.4–1.7 mm long, base 0.3–0.5 mm diameter, equal; anthers 0.3–0.4 mm long. Ovary 1.0–1.5 × 0.9–1.4 mm, broadly ovate to broadly elliptic, green to green-brown, apex usually with shoulders; style 0.15–0.25 mm long, cylindrical; stigma 0.3–0.5 mm diameter. Nectaries 4, 0.2–0.3 × c. 0.1 mm, oblong-obovate, green. Silicles cartilaginous when fresh, coriaceous when dry, 3.1–4.2 × 2.5–3.5 mm, elliptic-rhomboid to orbicular-rhomboid, valves light brown, glabrous, apex shallowly notched, not winged; style 0.2–0.3 mm long, exserted. Seeds 1.6–1.8 × 0.9–1.3 mm, narrowly ovoid, brown to orange-brown, not winged.

SIMILAR TAXA

Lepidium juvencum is distinguished by open, sprawling, straggling growth habit, and the stems are often trailing on the ground. The leaves are elliptic, elliptic-oblongate, obovate to elliptic-obovate, and have attenuate bases; the marginal teeth are usually small and are mostly confined to the distal third of the leaf. The silicles are most like *L. oleraceum* but differ by possessing a rounded, slightly notched apex.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand. South Island (known from a few sites near Dunedin and from Stewart Island (and possibly adjoining smaller islands))

THREATS

Known from one site near Dunedin and from several offshore islands from the Otago Peninsula to Stewart Island. Not common at any site. Historically more wide ranging (as evidenced from herbarium specimens). Most populations are very small (< 10 plants) and one is threatened by trampling.

GENUS

Lepidium

FAMILY

Brassicaceae

AUTHORITY

Lepidium juvencum Heenan et de Lange

SYNONYMS

None (first described in 2013)

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November - May

FRUITING

November - June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed. However prone to a wide range of exotic and indigenous diseases and so can sometimes be difficult to maintain in cultivation.

ETYMOLOGY

lepidium: Scale-shaped (pods)

NVS CODE

LEPJUV

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, DP, RR

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, DP, RR

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPR, NR, NStr, PF, RR, TL 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

de Lange, P.J.; Heenan, P.B.; Houliston, 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 (7 September 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 juvencum* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lepidium-juvencum/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

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

PDF DATE

25 May 2026