

# Lepidium oblitum

## COMMON NAMES

scurvy grass

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

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

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## 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 to yellow green, with toothed margins, smelling of cress when crushed. Inflorescences at branch tips, Flowers white with two-four stamens. Fruits circular, splitting cleanly into two valves, seeds orange-brown or red-brown.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tap-rooted, strongly pungent, sprawling, laxly though much-branched, leafy perennial shrub, forming patches up to 1.0 × 0.9 m. Plants usually dying down to rootstock and/or previous seasons stem nodes, towards end of growing season. Stems arising from rootstock base and basal portion of main central stem, widely and unevenly spaced or closely packed, woody, lax and sprawling, sometimes arching and subscendent, weakly angled to ± terete, glabrous; mature stems 2.1–4.6 mm diameter, 0.3–0.8 m long; brittle, devoid of leaves for at least the first two-thirds with the final third distinctly leafy and often much branched when vegetative, leaves shedding at flowering and fruiting; upper stems similar, though distinctly leafy and pliant. Leaves coriaceous, fleshy, green to dark green, often glossy. Rosette leaves 5–20, mostly present in autumn – early spring usually not persisting (very rarely so) at fruiting; petioles distinct, up to 40 × 2 mm, flat or slightly concave in cross-section, succulent; lamina oblanceolate, cuneiform, obovate-oblong to spatulate up to 60 × 22 mm, margins finely to deeply incised in upper quarter to one third, teeth in 3–8 pairs running to praemorse apex, basal few teeth pair usually asymmetric, base narrowly attenuate. Middle stem leaves mostly persisting at fruiting; petiole up to 32 mm long, mostly flat in cross-section, sometimes slightly concave, usually winged; lamina narrowly oblanceolate, oblanceolate, spatulate, oblong, obdeltoid, 15.0–56.2 × 12.0–18.6 mm; margins finely to deeply incised in distal one quarter to one third, teeth in 3–8 pairs running to the usually praemorse apex, basal few teeth pairs usually asymmetric, lamina base narrowly attenuate, extending as a wing (0.8–1.2 mm wide) usually to petiole base. Upper stem leaves petiolate, petiole 12 mm long, flat or slightly concave, usually broadly winged; lamina narrowly oblanceolate, narrowly lanceolate, narrowly spatulate, to linear-cuneiform, 10.2–29.0 × 2.4–4.8 mm; margins entire or deeply dentate, if dentate then usually asymmetrically tridentate (rarely with 1–4 teeth), lamina base narrowly attenuate, extending as a wing (0.3–1.7 mm wide) almost to petiole base. Racemes 30–76 mm long, usually congested, elongating up to 100 mm at fruiting, terminal and



Cultivated plant of *Lepidium oblitum* showing rosette leaves. Photographer: Peter B. Heenan, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Close-up of *Lepidium oblitum* flower. Photographer: Peter B. Heenan, Licence: CC BY-NC.

axillary; rachis and pedicels glabrous (pedicels very rarely bearing a few minute, caducous, glandular hairs near base); pedicels, erecto-patent to patent, 0.4–1.0 mm long, elongating to 0.8–2.0 mm long at fruiting. Flower buds dark green to green, apex glabrous. Flowers 1.6–2.0 mm diameter. Sepals 4, saccate, pale to dark green with a broad white, ± undulose margin, pale to dark green with a broad white, ± undulose margin, deeply concave, adaxially weakly keeled or not; lateral sepals 0.9 × 0.6 mm, broadly ovate to oblong, ± overlapping at base, apex rounded to obtuse, adaxial surface glabrous (sometimes diffusely papillate), abaxial surface usually glabrous, sometimes hairy near base, hairs patent, weakly flexuous, 0.1–0.3 mm long, eglandular, shedding at anthesis; median sepals 1.0 × 0.9 mm, broadly ovate to oblong, apex rounded to obtuse, adaxial surface glabrous, abaxial surface glabrous. Petals over-topping sepals, white, 0.9–1.3 × 0.5–0.8 mm, patent, clawed; limb broadly obovate, apex weakly retuse. Stamens 2–4, equal. Anthers c. 0.10 mm long. Pollen bright yellow. Nectaries 2, subulate, 0.3–0.42 mm long. Silicles cartilaginous when fresh, coriaceous when dry, orbicular, orbicular-ovate to ± rhomboid, 2.8–3.3 × 2.4–3.0 mm, margin winged, notably more so toward apex, apex notched, base obtuse, valves green maturing yellow-green, glabrous, dried surface ± coarsely reticulate; style 0.1–0.3 mm long, free from the narrow wing, usually exceeding the notch; stigma 0.18–0.22 mm diameter, capitate. Seeds 2, ovoid to ellipsoid, orange-brown to dark red-brown, not winged, 1.8–1.9 × 0.9–0.93 mm.

#### SIMILAR TAXA

*Lepidium oblitum* is superficially similar to *L. panniforme* with which it grows, and sometimes hybridise, and from which it is best separated by the rosette, basal and upper stem leaves which while toothed are never lacerate-serrate. Both species though closely allied are also genetically distinct (see de Lange et al. 2013).

#### DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. Chatham Islands (Mangere and Rabbit Islands)

#### HABITAT

Coastal. Known only from coastal cliffs, ridge lines and gulches - in the latter two habitat sit often grows in and around petrel burrows.

#### THREATS

Known only from two sites, the privately owned Rabbit Island, and Mangere Island Nature Reserve. Although the more common of the three *Lepidium* species on Mangere, hybrids between *L. oblitum* and *L. panniforme* have been located at several sites, suggesting that hybridism may be a threat. The species is also threatened by successional changes in the vegetation of that island. *Lepidium oblitum* is scarce on Rabbit Island. It should be searched for on Little Mangere island.

#### GENUS

*Lepidium*

#### FAMILY

Brassicaceae

#### AUTHORITY

*Lepidium oblitum* Houliston, Heenan et de Lange

#### SYNONYMS

None (first described in 2013)

#### ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

#### ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

November - March

## FRUITING

January - June

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from seed but fickle to maintain in cultivation. Prone to white rust (*Albugo candida*) which in cultivation may kill plants. Cultivated plants have proved difficult to flower.

## ETYMOLOGY

**lepidium:** Scale-shaped (pods)

**oblitum:** The epithet "oblitum" is derived from the Latin meaning "forgotten, disregarded or neglected"

## NVS CODE

LEPOBL

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

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

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

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## 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 oblitum* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lepidium-oblitum/> (Date website was queried)

## MORE INFORMATION

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

## PDF DATE

27 May 2026