

# Lepidium tenuicaule

## COMMON NAMES

shore cress

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

## FLOWER COLOURS

White

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rosette forming, perennial herb, arising from stout, deeply descending taproot. All parts pungent, smelling strongly of cress. Stems prostrate to ascending, glabrous (20-)80-150(-300) mm long. Leaves glabrous or glabrescent. Basal leaves persistent, pinnate, 20-100 x 0.5-0.15 mm, dark green, basally mottled with red or purple. Pinnae in (5-)7-15 pairs, acutely toothed. Stem leaves toothed at apex or entire, 5-20 x 2-5 mm, green, narrow-spathulate, linear-oblongate, long petiolate. Racemes 50-100 mm long at fruiting, somewhat flexuous, rachis and pedicels glabrous or sparsely hairy, pedicels distant, spreading, 2-4 mm long at fruiting. Sepals sparsely hairy, 0.5-1 x 0.3-0.5 mm. Petals 0 or if present white, < sepals. Stamens 4. silicles suborbicular, 1.5-2 x 1.5-1.8 mm, style 0.1 mm, free from narrow wing, = to or > than shallow notch, valves glabrous. Seed ovoid, brown c. 1 mm long.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Very distinctive and unlikely to be confused with any other species of lepidia. When sterile the rosette leaves have a remarkable resemblance to some species of *Leptinella*, from which they can be distinguished by their pungent cress smell when they are bruised.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic to the North and South Islands. In the North Island probably extinct, having been recorded only from Kapiti Island. In the South Island known from Oamaru south to the islands of the Foveaux Strait.

## HABITAT

Coastal turf where it seems to prefer damp peaty ground free from taller shrub and grass species. Very tolerant of shade and trampling such that some large populations are known from seaside car parks, footpaths, walking tracks and around lighthouse buildings. At one time this species was even a localised urban weed at Oamaru.

## THREATS

Probably more secure than was once believed, although it does seem to have gone extinct from the North Island, Oamaru and at nearby Cape Whanbrow. Very large populations occur from about Shag Point south along the Foveaux Strait. However, some of these have been lost due to changes in habitat caused by the removal of car parks and roads that cross coastal turfs to access coastal locations. With one or two exceptions the species remains vulnerable to any change in local disturbance regimes, particularly those which encourage the growth of taller shrubs and grasses.



Katiki, Otago. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



North Otago. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

## GENUS

Lepidium

## FAMILY

Brassicaceae

## AUTHORITY

Lepidium tenuicaule Kirk

## SYNONYMS

None

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

October - January

## FRUITING

November - February

## 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. With its multi-coloured ferny rosette leaves and compact habit, this is the ideal plant for places with compacted, poorly-drained and otherwise bare soil, such as driveways, shaded portions of poorly-drained lawns, and along the bases of brick walls.

## CULTIVATION

Occasionally available from some specialist native plant nurseries.

## ETYMOLOGY

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

**tenuicaule:** Thin-stemmed

## NVS CODE

LEPTEN

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, RR

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: RR

2009 | At Risk – Declining

2004 | Gradual Decline

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: CI, 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

Norton, D.A. and P.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 by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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## MORE INFORMATION

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

## PDF DATE

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