

Lepidosperma laterale

COMMON NAMES

sword sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Coarsely tufted perennial sedge arising from a stout woody rootstock.

Culms 0.5–2.0 m tall, 4–7 mm wide, rigidly coriaceous, laterally flattened with sharp, minutely scabrid margins to more or less convex above.

Leaves 3–5 mm wide, similar to culms but usually much shorter, equitant at the base, margins extremely minutely scabrid, apices acuminate.

Panicle 100–400 mm long, greyish brown when mature, rather narrow, rigidly erect; branches mostly distant, usually simple, erect; lowest bract with a stiff lamina 20–60 mm long, upper bracts shorter, distinctly mucronate, brown to grey-brown. **Spikelets** 6 mm long, distant on the lower branches, fascicled above, 1–4-flowered, only the uppermost flower fertile. **Glumes** 5–7, ovate, acuminate, pubescent towards the apex, the lowest 2–3 empty. **Hypogynous scales** 6, fused at base, each terminated by a fine ciliate seta, this up to ½ length of nut. **Nut** 2.5–3.5 × 1.5–2.0 mm, ovoid, more or less trigonous, the angles thickened, surface at first wrinkled, becoming smooth at maturity, brown; persistent style-base hardly distinguishable from nut, glabrous, brown, with a small black mucro.

SIMILAR TAXA

Could be confused with *Machaerina complanata* (Bergg.) Koyama and *Machaerina sinclairii* (Hook.f.) Koyama, and other sedges that have large, flat culms and leaves. However both these species have much wider culms or leaves (up to 30 mm in *Machaerina*) and denser flowered, usually pendulous, often distinctly fluffy inflorescences, and mostly grow in permanently damp situations (such as seepages) or in peat bogs.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. Australian and New Zealand. In New Zealand confined to the North Island where it common from Te Pahi south to about the King Country and the Bay of Plenty.

HABITAT

Coastal to lowland, where it usually grows on poorly drained clay soils in gumland scrub, in regenerating forest on steep hill slopes. Sometimes in damp sand such in dune swales and slacks or on sand podzols. Often grows in shrublands dominated by *Kunzea* Rchb. and *Leptospermum* J.R.Forst. et G.Forst..

GENUS

Lepidosperma

FAMILY

Cyperaceae



Coromandel, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Coromandel, March. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

AUTHORITY

Lepidosperma laterale R.Br.

SYNONYMS

None

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September–December

FRUITING

October–March (long persistent, usually present all year round)

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Scaly nuts are dispersed by water, wind and possibly ants (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Difficult to cultivate. Seed difficult to germinate. Plants resent root disturbance and usually die if transplanted. However, considerable success has been achieved growing plants and germinating seed in untreated saw dust. Nevertheless this is an attractive species to grown in a sunny situation, preferring poorly drained clay soils.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

WHERE TO BUY

Plants are occasionally available from specialist nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY

lepidosperma: Scale seed

NVS CODE

LEPLAT

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics* 11: 285–309.

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lepidosperma-laterale/>

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