

Leptinella tenella

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, RR

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CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledonous composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Soft, widely creeping, monoecious perennial herb forming loose patches or a dense turf depending on local conditions. **Rhizomes** at or near soil surface, dark red-green or green, pliant, sparsely villous hairy, branches usually single at flowering nodes; leaves in two rows single at apex, 5–20 mm apart. Short shoots alternate on either side of rhizome, bearing 1–6–(8) clustered leaves, occasionally converting to rhizomes, then bearing distant leaves. **Roots** white, numerous, slender up to 0.4 mm diameter. **Leaves** 1-pinnatifid, 10–40 × 4–15 mm, lamina up to 35 mm long, obovate, membranous, bright green (verdant green), sometimes with proximal pinnae brown pigmented, glabrous; midrib not raised on upper surface; pinnae 6–10–(12) pairs, not or scarcely overlapping, cut deeply to rachis, broadly elliptic to suborbicular; teeth numerous, on all pinnae, up to 12 per pinna, usually extending around the entire margin (sometimes lacking on proximal side), cut to $\frac{1}{3}$ across pinna, narrowly triangular to oblong, acute or mucronate, large ones sometimes bearing 1–2 teeth. **Peduncles** on rhizomes 5–15 mm, green or dark red-green, ebracteate or rarely with 1 bract, sparsely pilose. **Capitula** 2–6 mm diameter; surface convex; involucre upcurved or flat; involucral bracts 8–12 in 2 subequal rows, broadly elliptic, green, glabrous, with broad red-brown, scarious margins, not growing after anthesis; pistillate florets 20–45 in 2 or more rows, c. 1.5 mm long exceeding phyllaries, slightly curved, yellow-green; corolla slightly longer than wide, with almost equal dentation; staminate florets fewer, 10–15. **Cypselae** up to 1.3 × 0.6 mm, brown, slightly compressed, surface chartaceous and smooth.

SIMILAR TAXA

The bright green finely toothed almost feathery leaves are very distinctive. The only other New Zealand *Leptinella* to present this condition is the Chatham Islands and Auckland Islands endemic *L. potentillina* F. Muell. which is typically yellow-green rather than bright green and much larger in all respects, and is allopatric from *L. tenella*. In New Zealand proper *L. tenella* is most likely to be confused with *L. dispersa* (D.G.Lloyd) D.G.Lloyd et C.Webb with which it sometimes grows. The best way to distinguish it is by the obvious teeth which run all along the margin of the much larger pinnae and by the numerous female florets which are not obscured by the shorter involucral bracts. In the Wellington region where *L. dispersa* subsp. *dispersa* may be monoecious, the floral distinction with *L. tenella* is less obvious. In these areas the fact that subsp. *dispersa* leaves are typically brown to purple pigmented toward the base can help distinguish it from *L. tenella*.



Riparian, Whangārei Northland. Photographer: Marley Ford, Date taken: 10/12/2023, Licence: CC BY.



Riparian, Whangārei Northland. Photographer: Marley Ford, Date taken: 10/12/2023, Licence: CC BY.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (scattered from Mt Camel to Kawhia Harbour in the west and Matatā in east, thence absent until the Horowhenua and Wairarapa), South Island (local in North-west Nelson and the Marlborough Sounds).

HABITAT

Lowland, usually on stream margins where they enter estuaries, on lake margins or on the margins of freshwater swamps and wetlands bordering saltmarsh. On occasion this species has been found on cattle pugged swampy ground bordering saltmarshes. Intolerant of much shading and grass competition it favours sites that are kept open through periodic disturbance from high tides and flooding. Very rarely found inland on lake margins.

THREATS

A naturally uncommon species of sporadic distribution. Some populations have declined due to spread of weeds and associated wetland drainage

GENUS

Leptinella

FAMILY

Asteraceae

AUTHORITY

Leptinella tenella (A.Cunn.) D.G.Lloyd et C.Webb

SYNONYMS

Soliva tenella A.Cunn., Cotula membranacea D.G.Lloyd

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

August–November–(December)

FRUITING

October–January–(April)

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Papery cypselae are dispersed by wind and possibly attachment (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from rooted pieces, a very attractive plant ideal for damp soils. Prefers a sunny aspect but will grow in dappled light. An excellent lawn cover on poorly drained ground.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION

Occasionally available from specialist native plant nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY

leptinella: From the Greek word leptos (meaning slender, thin or delicate), referring to the ovary

tenella: Delicate

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 52

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, RR, Sp

2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, RR, Sp

2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, RR, Sp

2004 | Sparse

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR 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

Lloyd DG. 1972. A revision of the New Zealand, Subantarctic, and South American species of *Cotula*, section *Leptinella*. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 10(2): 277–372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0028825X.1972.10429156>.

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. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 31 August 2006. Description from Lloyd (1972) - as *Cotula tenella*.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/leptinella-tenella/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026