Lycopus europaeus

COMMON NAMES
Gypsywort

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Mint-like plant, up to 1 m tall, with square stems, toothed paired leaves and tiny white or pale mauve flowers produced in groups above each pair of leaves in the upper stem, but no minty smell when crushed.

FLOWER COLOURS
Purple, Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Perennial herb. Stem hairy, to c. 1 m tall. Lvs shortly petiolate or sessile. Lamina 3-8.5 × 1-3 cm, ovate-lanceolate to elliptic, deeply crenate-serrate, hairy at first, becoming glabrous or nearly so; basal area with narrow-oblong or linear-oblong lobes extending to midrib; apex ± acuminate. Upper lvs and bracts smaller, without basal lobes, hairy, especially on veins below. Calyx c. 3 mm long, hairy; teeth > tube, lanceolate-acuminate. Corolla 3.5-4 mm long, white with purple spots on lower lip and in throat. Nutlets 1.2-1.3 mm long, broad-obovoid, glandular and swollen on anterior face, with margin clearly delimited.

SIMILAR TAXA
Superficially similar to mints (Mentha spp.) but lacking the characteristic smell of those plants.

Whanganui. Mar 2013. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Inflroescences. Whanganui. Feb 2013. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION
Abundant in the Waikato and Rotorua Lakes, few sites in Northland, Auckland and in Westland near Haast.

HABITAT
Lake and river margins, drains and swamps, often growing at the base of raupo and tall sedges.

GENUS
Lycopus

FAMILY
Lamiaceae

AUTHORITY
Lycopus europaeus L.

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
Summer and autumn

FRUITING
Summer and autumn

YEAR NATURALISED
1940

ORIGIN
Europe, cold temperate Asia

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Possibly as a herbal plant

CONTROL TECHNIQUES
Rarely controlled, but can be controlled manually, mechanically or herbicidally depending on situation.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Seed dispersed by water, footwear or contaminated machinery.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)
This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report here.

NVS CODE
LYCEUR

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING
Webb, C.J.; Sykes, W.R.; Garnock-Jones, P.J. (1988). Flora of New Zealand Volume 4: Naturalised pteridophytes, gymnosperms, dicotyledons. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.
Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.
Champion et al (2012). Freshwater Pests of New Zealand. NIWA publication.
http://www.niwa.co.nz/freshwater-and-estuaries/management-tools/identification-guides-and-fact-sheets/freshwater-pest-species

ATTRIBUTION
Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA). Features description from Webb et al., (1988).

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lycopus-europaeus/

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08 June 2026