Machaerina tenax

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Grass-green, reed-like tufted sedge. Culms narrow, terete, internally septate culms. Inflorescences dark brown to black-brown,spike-like with narrow and pointed apices; inflorescence branches tapered, more or less widely spaced, spikelets clustered. Nut smooth, yellow when mature.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Stout, densely tufted, light-green (grass-green) perennial. **Rhizome** 2–3 mm diameter, with culms closely and evenly spaced along it. **Culms** 0.15–1.65 m tall, 0.5–1.5 mm wide, slender, terete, rigidly pliant and wiry. **Leaves** reduced to basal, reddish pink, sheathing bracts; the uppermost often furnished with a terete lamina like the culm. **Inflorescence** 50–250 mm long, very narrow, spike-like; branchlets remote, slender, erect from sheathing mucronate bracts. **Spikelets** 6–8 mm long, ± distant, not fascicled, light grey-brown or reddish, distinct at the tips of the branchlets, 1-flowered. **Glumes** usually 3, 2 lower glumes ± membranous, lanceolate, shortly acuminate, the uppermost glume longer, spreading with maturation of the fruit. **Nut**, including beak, c. 2.5 × 1.5 mm, yellow, ovoid (trigonous when immature), narrowed below to a short, dark brown stalk, narrowed above to a dark brown, pyramidal beak, c. 1 mm long, rounded at the tip.

SIMILAR TAXA
Machaerina tenax is recognised by the grass-green, narrow, terete, internally septate culms; dark brown to black-brown, spike-like inflorescences which narrow toward and are at pointed at the apex; by the more or less approximate spikelet branchlets; and by the yellow, smooth-surfaced nut.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand: North, South, Stewart and Chatham Islands (but scarce in Northland and much of the eastern South Island).

HABITAT
Coastal to subalpine. Usually on peat in bogs, around tarns and slow flowing peaty streams. However, *Machaerina tenax* has also been found growing in poorly draining pasture and in rough pasture land in hill country, at the back of estuarine swamps (where it may grow with *M. juncea* and *M. complanata*) and under willow in willow car.

GENUS
Machaerina

FAMILY
Cyperaceae



Machaerina tenax culms. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Machaerina tenax flowering inflorescence. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

AUTHORITY
Machaerina tenax (Hook.f.) Koyama

SYNONYMS
Lampocarya tenax Hook.f.; Cladium tenax (Hook.f.) Druce; Baumea tenax (Hook.f.) Blake

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
December–February

FRUITING
Fruits present throughout the year

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Difficult. Can be grown from fresh seed but slow to establish. Resents root disturbance. Plants seem to flourish best if established first in untreated pine saw dust. *Machaerina tenax* is an attractive species that does well when planted in seepages in full sun or around ponds. It prefers a moderately acidic substrate.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACW: Facultative Wetland
Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY
tenax: Tough

NVS CODE
MACTEN

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR, SO, TL 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.
Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NS, RR, Sp 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
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

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (25 March 2012). Description adapted from Moore & Edgar (1970)
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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/machaerina-tenax/

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25 May 2026