Microlaena stipoides

COMMON NAMES
meadow rice grass, slender rice grass

BIOSTATUS
Native

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Grasses

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Rhizomatous perennial with extravaginal branching, and much branched, multinoded stems of many cauline, often stiff hairy leaves, and often purpled spikelets on erectly branched narrow panicles. **Branching** extravaginal; rhizomes sometimes short; cataphylls chaffy. **Leaf-sheath** tight, short hairy or glabrous, overlapping node above, keel obscure. **Ligule** to 0.5 mm, finely erose, ciliate. **Auricles** 2, small, margin hairs (c. 3 mm) few. **Collar** short stiff hairy. **Leaf-blade** 5–25 cm × 2–5 mm wide, abaxially and adaxially abundantly stiff hairy sometimes more so abaxially, midrib prominent; margins with close-set, sharp teeth, retrorse below antrorse above, sometimes thickened, white, undulating. **Culm** to 85 cm, internodes many, glabrous, sometimes longitudinally grooved. **Panicle** 10–25 cm, narrow, slender, internodes short, branches erect to 5 cm, > internodes, rachis longitudinally grooved; branches and pedicels finely scabrid. **Spikelets** 25–35 mm, on slender finely scabrid pedicels; Ø lemmas often purple or purple-suffused. **Glumes** ± equal, 1-nerved, entire, often purple, margins ciliate, distant from Ø lemmas, < callus hairs; lower to 0.8 mm, upper to 1.5 mm. **Callus** 1–1.5–2 mm, clothed in hairs to 2 mm. **Lower Ø lemma** 12–20–30 mm, 5–7-nerved, scabrid, margin short (0.25 mm) hairy, awn > ½ lemma length. **Upper Ø lemma** 17–26–35 mm, prickle-toothed throughout or glabrous below and prickled above, 5–7-nerved, awn > ½ lemma length; callus hairs 0. ≣ lemma 5–7–9 mm, 5–7-nerved, shining, smooth except for teeth on upper ½ of keel, shortly awned (0.1–1.0 mm) from shortly lobed ciliate apex, margins hyaline; when cleistogamous often included by upper Ø lemma. **Palea** membranous, hyaline, produced into a mucro or becoming acute, apex ciliate; dimorphic, 4–6–8 mm in chasmogamous flowers, 2–3–4 mm in cleistogamous flowers. **Lodicules** 2, 1–2–2.7 mm in chasmogamous flowers occasionally hair-tipped, falling with caryopsis; 0 in cleistogamous flowers. **Stamens** 2–3–4; anthers 1.5–2.5–4.2 mm in chasmogamous flowers, (1)–2–3–4, 0.2–0.4–1.0 mm in cleistogamous flowers. **Gynoecium**: ovary 0.8–1.2 mm; stigma-styles 1.2–2.5–4.0 mm in chasmogamous flowers, 0.8–1.4–2.0 mm in cleistogamous flowers, stigma branches reaching ovary. **Caryopsis** laterally compressed, finely wrinkled, often falling free, 3.5–4.5–5.5 mm in chasmogamous flowers, 2–3.8–5.8 in cleistogamous flowers; embryo 0.6-1.0 mm. 2n= 48.

Kerikeri River. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 09/03/2007, Licence: CC BY.

Spikelet; lawn; Forres St, Whanganui. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 07/01/2017, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION
North Island: throughout. South Island: throughout, less frequent in Canterbury, Otago, and Westland, absent in Fiordland; Stewart Island. Kemadec Islands: Raoul Island. Chatham Islands.
Also indigenous to Australia and Malesia.
There is every reason to believe that Australian races are here as migrants, but it may be impossible to differentiate between them and indigenous plants, however some races appear larger.

HABITAT
Open lowland forest and mānuka-kānuka scrub, ruderal and in rough pasture; sea level to 1,300 m.

GENUS
Microlaena

FAMILY
Poaceae

AUTHORITY
Microlaena stipoides (Labill.) R.Br.

SYNONYMS
Ehrharta stipoides Labill.; Microlaena stipoides (Labill.) R.Br. var. stipoides

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACU: Facultative Upland
Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION
Occasionally sold by specialist native plant nurseries. However, often present in gardens as a lawn and hedge weed.

ETYMOLOGY
microlaena: Small cover (outer scales of spikelet)
stipoides: Like Stipa, another grass

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY
Key to the grasses of New Zealand

NVS CODE
MICSTI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 48

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.
Otago: 2025 | Regionally At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, 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

Edgar E, Connor HE. 2010. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. V. Grasses, 2nd edition. Manaaki Whenua Press, Christchurch, NZ. 650 p.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared by Marley Ford (28 December 2021). Brief description, Distribution, Habitat, and Features sections copied from Edgar & Connor (2010).

MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/microlaena-stipoides/

PDF DATE

08 July 2026