

Microtis unifolia

COMMON NAMES

onion-leaved orchid, microtis

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: S?O

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Orchids

FLOWER COLOURS

Green

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Terrestrial, glabrous, colony forming, fleshy, tuberous bright green to dark green perennial herb. Plants at flowering up to 1 m tall. **Tubers** globose to ovoid. **Stem** erect, terete, often striated. **Leaf** solitary, usually overtopping inflorescence, bright green to dark green, rarely tinged with red near base, closely sheathing stem for much of length, linear-terete, hollow, up to 800 mm long. **Inflorescence** a raceme up to 300 × 10 mm. **Flowers** 6–100, up to 4 mm diameter, shortly-stalked and closely spaced, more or less overlapping. **Perianth** green, segments up to 2.5 mm long, widely spreading, thick and fleshy. **Dorsal sepal** 3 mm long, broadly ovate, erect or projecting forwards, cucullate, concave, column-embracing, acute with apex usually slightly turned upwards, smaller than ovary at flowering. **Lateral sepals** much shorter and narrower, acute, strongly deflexed, apices tending to coil under. **Petals** shorter still, obtuse, erect, usually partially hidden under dorsal sepal. **Labellum** sessile, up to 2.5 mm long, green or yellow-green, oblong, sharply deflexed or decurved, pinched in at about mid-length to form a slight to obvious waste; apex truncate or slightly emarginate, not apiculate though often folded to appear so; margin papillose and usually also crenate and undulate; anterior callus variously developed, verrucose, rather irregular, often raised on a rounded ridge; basal calli dark green, oval, prominent, and usually continuous at sides with narrow band of callus behind transverse, slit-like (not pouched) furrow; labellum standing away from ovary at a very narrow angle. **Column** short, obtuse, base of column about as broad as stigma, wings mostly membranous throughout. **Anther** terminal, erect, situated above stigma, hemispherical, pollinia spheroidal, pollen granular. **Stigma** broadly ovate; rostellum ovate. **Capsules** broadly ovoid, ovoid-ellipsoid, brown when ripe.



Akatarawa Range. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 12/02/2015, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from *M. parviflora* by the more or less oblong rather than triangular labellum. *Microtis oligantha* is similar but has fewer flowers (up to 10 cf. up to 100); the dorsal sepal of *M. unifolia* is acute and the apex usually sharply uptilted rather than obtuse with the apex not tilted upwards; *M. oligantha* has a short-oblong to almost quadrate labellum with shallowly crenate or undulate margins; *M. unifolia* has a long-oblong labellum usually narrowed at mid-length, and with deeply crenate and unudulose margins. The basal calli of *M. oligantha* are indistinct and tabular, while those of *M. unifolia* are oval and prominent.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: Kermadec Islands, Manawatāwhi / Three Kings Islands, North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura, Chatham Islands. Exact New Zealand distribution unclear due to confusion with an allied, later flowering entity. Also Australia, Norfolk Island, New Caledonia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan and China.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane. Widespread in mainly disturbed or successional habitats. Common in urban areas in lawns, verges, roadside banks and cuttings and even amongst moss filled crevices on old buildings.

GENUS

Microtis

FAMILY

Orchidaceae

AUTHORITY

Microtis unifolia (G.Forst.) Rchb.f.

SYNONYMS

Ophrys unifolia Forst.f.; *Epipactis porrifolia* Schwartz; *Microtis banksii* Hook; *Microtis longifolia* Col.; *Microtis papillosa* Col.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

A distinctive late flowering form, which flowers from December–April appears to be unnamed and worthy of specific recognition. NZPCN has not included that entity in this Fact Sheet.

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

August–November

FRUITING

October–March

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown and inclined to become invasive. Often present as a pot contaminant in nurseries.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

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

ETYMOLOGY

microtis: Tiny eared

unifolia: Single leaved

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to native orchids of New Zealand

NVS CODE

MICUNI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 88

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: S?O

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened 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 Not Threatened 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.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 14 April 2007. Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970). Some of this factsheet information is derived from Flora of New Zealand Online and is used under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand licence.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/microtis-unifolia/>

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25 May 2026