

Myriophyllum triphyllum

COMMON NAMES

Water milfoil

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS

Cream, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Weak aquatic herb; stems 50-100 cm long, rooting mainly at base, 1-2(-3) mm diameter; leaves dimorphic, verticillate. Submerged leaves in whorls of (2-)3(-4), ovate in outline, sessile (petiole 0.1-0.2 mm long), (6-)10-15 mm long, (5-)7-10(-15) mm wide, pectinate with 12-18 filiform pinnae 8 mm long. Leaves lacking hydathodes at base. Emergent leaves red-purple, in whorls of 3(-4), very rarely becoming alternate in upper part of inflorescence, narrowly ovate to obovate, (2.5-)5-6(-12) × (1.5-)2.0-2.5(-4.0) mm, entire (or those of lower whorls incised), obtuse, shorter than internodes at flowering. Transition from submerged to emergent leaves abrupt (1-2 whorls). Inflorescence all indeterminate spike, sometimes with 2-4 lateral inflorescences arising from axils of the upper whorl of submerged leaves. Flowers 4-merous, borne singly in axils of the emergent leaves, upper flowers male, lower ones female. Bracteoles cream, lanceolate, (1.0-)1.4-1.8(2.0) × (0.2-)0.3-0.4 mm, entire or minutely 3-4 toothed, acute. Male flowers. Sepals 4, cream, deltoid, 0.5-0.6 mm long, 0.4-0.5 mm wide, weakly 2-3-toothed. Petals 4, yellow to reddish, hooded, not or only very weakly keeled, 2.0-2.8 × 2.0 mm wide. Stamens 8; filaments 0.1 mm long, lengthening after anthesis; anthers linear-oblong, 1.8-2.4 × 0.4 mm wide, antisepalous anthers c. 0.3 mm longer than antipetalous ones, non-apiculate. Styles 4, clavate, c. 0.2 mm long, vestigial. Ovary ± cubiform, 0.7 mm long, 0.6 mm wide, lobed opposite petals, non-functional. Petals and stamens of lowermost whorl of male flowers sometimes smaller than in upper whorls. Female flowers. Sepals 4, deltoid, 0.2 mm long, 0.2 mm wide, minutely serrate, vestigial. Petals 4, 0.5 mm long, vestigial. Stamens 0. Styles 4, clavate, 0.5 mm long, stigmas fimbriate, cream. Ovary ± cubiform, 1.0 mm long, 0.8 mm wide, 4-lobed opposite petals. Fruit reddish-purple, ± cubiform, 1.3-1.4(-1.5) × 1.4-1.5 mm wide, styles persistent and erect, fruit prominently 4-lobed opposite styles, splitting at maturity into 4 mericarps. Mericarps cylindrical, 1.4 mm long, 0.8 mm diam., smooth and rounded on dorsal surface, sometimes with a faint dorsal line, planar on faces where joined to other mericarps.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North, South and Chatham Islands



Stevensons Island, Lake Wanaka.

Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.



Plant growing at Te Paki Dune lakes with Potamogeton cheesemanii. Photographer: Lisa Forester, Licence: CC BY-SA.

GENUS

Myriophyllum

FAMILY

Haloragaceae

AUTHORITY

Myriophyllum triphyllum Orchard

SYNONYMS

Myriophyllum elatinoides

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. An excellent plant for pond, slow flowing stream or fish tank.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available.

ETYMOLOGY

myriophyllum: Many leaves

triphyllum: Three-leaved

NVS CODE

MYRTRI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 42

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 Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: 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.

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

Orchard, A.E. 1979: *Myriophyllum* (Haloragaceae) in Australasia. 1. New Zealand: a revision of the genus and a synopsis of the family. *Brunonia* 2: 247-287.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet Prepared by P.J. de Lange (1 November 2009). Description based on Orchard (1979)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/myriophyllum-triphyllum/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026