

Oenanthe aquatica

COMMON NAMES

horsebane

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Upright to sprawling floating marginal perennial aquatic plant up to 1.5 m tall. Foliage is finely divided and hemlock-like, stems are hollow and reddish in colour. Submerged leaves are finely divided with threadlike segments.

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Biennial to perennial sprawling or erect herb up to 1.5 m tall, either floating (sometimes with submerged foliage) or terrestrial. Stems hollow, slightly grooved, usually tinged reddish purple. Emergent leaves bi to 4-pinnate, with segments up to 10 mm long, segments either crenate or pinnatifid. Submerged leaves 3-4 pinnate with filiform pinnae. Flowers in an umbel, either terminal or opposite a leaf 1-5 cm diameter, with (3)-5-12 rays. Subtending bracts 1 - (3) or lacking. Flowers white or pink tinged c. 2 mm diameter. Fruit ovoid-cylindric 3-5 mm long, prominently ribbed.

SIMILAR TAXA

American horsebane (*Oenanthe sarmentosa*) and water celery (*Apium nodiflorum*) have less divided leaves with longer segments. Both species form dense sprawling mats, with stems rooting at the nodes.

DISTRIBUTION

Locally common in Marlborough.

HABITAT

Still and slow flowing water bodies, marshes and seasonally flooded wetlands.

GENUS

Oenanthe

FAMILY

Apiaceae

AUTHORITY

Oenanthe aquatica (L.) Poiret

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

Summer

FRUITING

Summer-autumn

YEAR NATURALISED

1940



ORIGIN

Europe and Western Asia

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Unknown, possibly a seed contaminant

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Not controlled in New Zealand.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Seed floating and dispersed by water.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

OBL: Obligate Wetland

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

NVS CODE

OENAUQU

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.

ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA).

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/oenanthe-aquatica/>

PDF DATE

08 June 2026