

Persicaria hydropiper

COMMON NAMES

water pepper

BIOSTATUS

Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Erect annual herb up to ca 75cm tall, with reddish stems, willow-shaped leaves and long slender flower spikes with small white (greenish flowers).

FLOWER COLOURS

Cream, Green

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The leaves are bright green, without markings, they are narrow and lance shaped with a wavy edge, and up to 12 cm long. There is a membranous sheath (ochrea) at the base of each leaf, that is fringed with short hairs. The inflorescence is slender and drooping, the small flowers occur on short stalks, they are pink or cream (rarely white to greenish white). The fruit is a dull, pitted, dark brown nut. The plant is burning (peppery) to taste

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from *Persicaria decipiens* when flowering by the yellow glands on the tepals of *Persicaria hydropiper*. The flower heads of *P. decipiens* are usually erect, and the leaves are dark green/red and often have dark blotches on them; it also lacks the peppery flavour of *P. hydropiper*

DISTRIBUTION

Abundant in lowland regions of the North and South Islands.

HABITAT

Occurs on the edge of river banks and marshy areas, also occurring as a submerged plant in clear moderate flowing streams. Not usually grazed by livestock, especially cattle.

GENUS

Persicaria

FAMILY

Polygonaceae

AUTHORITY

Persicaria hydropiper (L.) Spach

SYNONYMS

Polygonum hydropiper



Polygonum hydropiper. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Polygonum hydropiper. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November-June

FRUITING

Autumn

YEAR NATURALISED

1906

ORIGIN

Temperate Eurasia, North Africa

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Unknown, possibly a seed contaminant

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Not controlled in New Zealand.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Spreads by seed dispersed by water or waterfowl.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

ETYMOLOGY

persicaria: Medieval name referring to the likeness of the leaves to a peach tree

NVS CODE

PERHYD

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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

Popay et al (2010). An illustrated guide to common weeds of New Zealand, third edition. NZ Plant Protection Society Inc, 416pp.

Coffey BT, Clayton JS (1988). New Zealand water plants: a guide to plants found in New Zealand freshwaters. Ruakura Agricultural Centre. 65pp.

ATTRIBUTION

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/persicaria-hydropiper/>

PDF DATE

25 May 2026