Polygala myrtifolia

COMMON NAMES
sweet pea shrub

BIOSTATUS
Exotic

CONSERVATION STATUS
Not applicable

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

FLOWER COLOURS
Red/Pink, Violet/Purple

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Perennial much-branched shrub up to 2m high. Young stems with short curly hairs, glabrous when older. Leaves all alternate, glabrous or very sparsely hairy, elliptic to obovate, obtuse or rarely slightly retuse, entire, 15~30mm long; petioles 1~2mm long. Flowers clustered in short simple terminal racemes; perianth coloured or veined purple toward apex; pedicels 5~8mm long; bracts suborbicular, 2~3mm long, persistent; 3 outer sepals ovate, 5~7mm long; wings petaloid, ovate-orbicular, approx. 15~17mm long, slightly > corolla; outer petals 2-lobed, around 1/3~1/4 length of keel; keel with a fimbriate crest near apex. Capsule glabrous, around 10mm long with a marginal wing about 1mm wide, approx. 2/3 length of persistent calyx wings; seeds hairy, dark brown, oblong, about 5mm long; strophiole 3-lobed.

Polygala myrtifolia. Photographer: Richard Hursthouse, Licence: CC BY.

Polygala myrtifolia. Photographer: Richard Hursthouse, Licence: CC BY.

SIMILAR TAXA
Much-branched shrub up to 2m; leaves are 2.5cm, alternate, oval and light green; younger stems of the plant are covered in short, curly hairs; pea-like flowers, 1.5cm long, are clustered at the end of each short branchlet; petals are pinky-purple, middle petal is white with a purple blush ending in a tuft of white hairs; seeds are dark brown and hairy in a 10mm winged capsule.

HABITAT
Terrestrial. Susceptible to frost. Coastal areas, forest margins, open land, islands, inland scrub. Seeds are dispersed by wind and sometimes water; the majority fall close to the parent plant.

GENUS
Polygala

FAMILY
Polygalaceae

AUTHORITY
Polygala myrtifolia L.

FLOWERING
January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September, October, November, December

YEAR NATURALISED
1870

ORIGIN
South Africa

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION
Ornamental

TOLERANCES
Tolerant of shade and wet conditions. Seedlings regrow after fire.

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Perennial. Prolific seeder;

NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES
This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord. The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the MPI website.

ENVIRONMENTAL WEED (2024)
This plant is named in a list of 386 environmental weeds in New Zealand 2024 prepared by DOC. 759 candidate species were considered for inclusion on this new comprehensive list of environmental weeds in New Zealand. The species considered were drawn from published lists of weed species, lists of plants that must be reported or managed by law if observed, existing national and regional programmes and agreements for pest management, and species already managed by the Department of Conservation (DOC). Candidate species were then assessed to see if they were fully naturalised and whether they have more than minor impacts in natural ecosystems. Read the full report here.

NVS CODE
POLMYR

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/polygala-myrtifolia/

PDF DATE
25 May 2026