

# Rytidosperma merum

## BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp, DPS

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

## CATEGORY

Vascular

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Rather fine-leaved, densely tufted, light green, shortly rhizomatous grass. Older growth distinctly straw-coloured, with long, drooping or trailing culms; leaves very much less than culms; branching extra or intervaginal. **Leaf-sheath** pale stramineous, glabrous with a sparse apical tuft of hairs up to 1.5 mm long. **Ligule** 0.1–0.2 mm. **Leaf-blade** 250–400 mm, more or less flat, glabrous, occasionally with a few sparse, scattered hairs, margins scabrid. **Culm** very slender, tawny with smooth internodes otherwise minutely scabrid below inflorescence, elongating to 0.14 m (or more) at maturity. **Inflorescence** a raceme or racemose panicle with 1–2 short branches at base, slender to 80 mm, comprising few narrow, sessile to subsessile spikelets; rachis and pedicels finely scabrid with longer fine hairs on margins especially below spikelets. **Spikelets** 4–6-flowered, awns exerted from glumes. **Glumes** light green, occasionally purplish, lanceolate, subobtusate 7–15 mm, more or less equal, 5–7-nerved. **Lemma** 2.5–4 mm, 7–9-nerved, upper row of hairs in small marginal tufts only, about equal to lemma or occasionally with upper tufts absent, lower row in small marginal tufts only, or a few small tufts or single hairs on margin; lobes 3–8.5 mm, soon tapering to a fine awn; central awn 6.5–14 mm, column 2.5–3.5 mm. **Palea** 2.5–5 mm, > upper lemma hairs, interkeel and margins glabrous. **Callus** 0.6–1 mm, marginal hair tufts rarely reaching base of lower lateral tufts. **Rachilla** 0.5–0.6 mm. **Anthers** 0.3–1.5 mm. **Seed** 1.7–2.5 × 0.9–1.2 mm.

## SIMILAR TAXA

One of the more distinctive species in *Rytidosperma*. Most frequently confused with the naturalised *R. racemosum* (R.Br.) Connor et Edgar from which it differs by the much shorter leaves than culms, finer leaves, long, drooping and trailing culms, and by the lemma hairs in two pairs of marginal tufts, rarely with a few single hairs in a lower row, and by the short, stout, callus up to 1 mm long. In *R. racemosum* the lemma hairs form a continuous lower row, and an interrupted, tufted, upper row, and the callus is long (up to 1.5 mm) and distinctly narrower than in *R. merum*.

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North Island (Kaingaroa Plains and Kaimanawa Mountains, eastern Wairarapa and Aorangi Range), South Island (Marlborough, Canterbury, Otago—near Alexandra and Sutton Salt Lakes, Middlemarch).

## HABITAT

Lowland to montane (100–800 m a.s.l.) in dry sites, usually in open short-tussock grassland but also on rock outcrops.

## THREATS

Not known to be threatened but apparently very uncommon throughout its range. Can be very common at the few sites it is known from.



Sutton Salt Lake, April. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

## GENUS

Rytidosperma

## FAMILY

Poaceae

## AUTHORITY

Rytidosperma merum Connor et Edgar

## SYNONYMS

Austroanthonia mera (Connor et Edgar) H.P.Linder

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## FLOWERING

October–December

## FRUITING

November–April

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Dislikes humidity.

## ETYMOLOGY

**rytidosperma**: Wrinkled seed

## MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to the grasses of New Zealand](#)

## NVS CODE

RYTMER

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DP, Sp

2009 | Data Deficient | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Sparse

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, NR, NStr, PF, RR 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

Edgar E, Connor HE. 2000. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. V. Grasses. Manaaki Whenua Press, Christchurch, NZ. 650 p.

## ATTRIBUTION

Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000).

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## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/rytidosperma-merum/>

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