

Sabdariffa diversifolia subsp. diversifolia

COMMON NAMES

puarangi, native hibiscus, swamp hibiscus, prickly hibiscus

BIOSTATUS

Native

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: RR, SO

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Sprawling tangled thorny shrub bearing broad thin leaves and large dark-centred flowers forming dense thickets by streamsides and in wetlands in northern Northland. Stems with small hooks. Leaves to 100 mm long and 80 mm wide, with 3–5 uneven irregular teeth, on long thorny stalk. Fruit a dry hairy 20 mm long capsule.

FLOWER COLOURS

White, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Semi-erect, erect or prostrate, widely spreading, much branched subshrub or shrub typically forming dense intertangled thickets up to 2 × 3 m, or creeping masses. **Stems** stout and woody, especially near base.

Young branches and leaf petioles copiously clad in numerous small, sharp, 1–2 mm conical prickles and dense, fine stellate hairs. **Petioles** up to 80 mm long. **Leaves** 50–100 × 30–80 mm, lamina ovate, orbicular to suborbicular, shallowly to deeply palmately 3–5-lobed, broadly to shallowly cordate or truncate, margins irregularly crenate–dentate to dentate–serrate, upper surface sparsely hispid hairy, undersides often densely so. Inflorescences in 5–20-flowered (sometimes more) terminal apparent racemes. **Flowers** 50–80 mm diameter; pedicels 1–3 mm long, prickly. **Epicalyx segments** 7–12, narrowly lanceolate, 8–12 mm long, shortly connate at base, hispid. **Calyx** 7–12 mm long, densely clad in hispid or stiff straight hyaline hairs, lobes narrowly deltoid to lanceolate, c. 10 mm long. **Petals** 35–40 × 50–58 mm, obovate, pale lemon–yellow, with a dark maroon base. **Capsule** 20 × 20 mm, ovoid, clad in long stiff hairs. **Seeds** 3.6–5.0 mm long, reniform to irregularly triangular, pale to dark brown or black-brown, sometimes with paler stripes, surface glabrous, smooth or irregular.

SIMILAR TAXA

A well marked species easily distinguished from other *Hibiscus* and *Sabdariffa* species cultivated or naturalised in New Zealand by the prickly stems and leaf petioles.



Te Paki. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 07/11/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Prickles and hairs on petioles and stems. Te Paki. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 07/11/2007, Licence: CC BY.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. In New Zealand this species has apparently always been restricted to the northern most extremity of the North Island (from about Reef Point and Doubtless Bay north). The largest populations known occur on the eastern side of Te Pahi. However, several of these owe to their origins to deliberate plantings by conservation minded locals. Outside New Zealand this species is also known from tropical Africa, Australia, New Guinea, the Philippines, many Pacific Islands and Central and South America. The majority of New Zealand plants match *Sabdariffa diversifolia* subsp. *diversifolia*.

HABITAT

Coastal wetlands and streamsides. Often growing amongst raupo (*Typha orientalis* C.B.Presl) at the back of dune slacks or close to brackish streams. Very rarely in gumland scrub or on ultramafic rubble.

THREATS

This species is under severe threat from the actions of browsing animals, particularly wild cattle and horses which greedily devour it wherever they can find accessible plants. Some populations at Tokerau Beach have been eliminated by coastal housing development.

GENUS

Sabdariffa

FAMILY

Malvaceae

AUTHORITY

Sabdariffa diversifolia (Jacq.) McLay & R.L.Barrett subsp. diversifolia

SYNONYMS

Hibiscus diversifolius Jacq. subsp. diversifolius, Hibiscus taylorii Buchanan nom. nud.

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

September - April (but sporadic flowering may occur at anytime of the year)

FRUITING

October to May (but fruit may be found at anytime of the year)

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Seeds are dispersed by wind, water and possibly by accidental ingestion of seed by birds (Barrett et al. 2025).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Very easily grown from fresh seed and semi-hardwood cuttings. An attractive shrub, ideal for a coastal garden or sheltered situation when grown inland. Rather frost tender, in cooler areas it can be treated as a vine and grown up walls which protects it from frost. The prickly stems and petioles can be unpleasant. The creeping form reputedly from the Surville Cliffs makes an ideal ground cover. *Sabdariffa diversifolia* can be grown around ponds and in boggy ground.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION

Periodically offered by most commercial garden centres. Plants are held by several specialist native plant nurseries. Two forms seem to be available, an erect shrub-forming plant typical of the wild New Zealand form, and another prostrate, creeping form, which came from the ultramafic rocks of the Surville Cliffs, North Cape (where it is now probably extinct).

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for February 2023](#) for the full story.

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 72

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: DP, RR, SO

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: DP, RR, SO, Sp

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered | Qualifiers: SO, Sp

2004 | Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Barrett RL, Nobuko Yoshikawa V, McLay TGB, Duarte MC, Mwachala G, Hanes MM. 2025. Reinstatement of *Sabdariffa* and new combinations to support a monophyletic concept of *Hibiscus* (Malvaceae: Hibisceae). *Australian Systematic Botany* 38(3). doi:10.1071/SB24013

de Lange PJ, Heenan PB, Norton DA, Rolfe JR, Sawyer JWD. 2010. Threatened Plants of New Zealand. Canterbury University Press, Christchurch.

Johnson AT, Smith HA. 1986. Plant Names Simplified: Their pronunciation, derivation and meaning. Landsman Bookshop Ltd: Buckenhill, UK.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet Prepared by P.J. de Lange (1 November 2009). Description by P.J. de Lange subsequently published in de Lange et al (2010).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Sabdariffa diversifolia* subsp. *diversifolia* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/sabdariffa-diversifolia-subsp-diversifolia/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/sabdariffa-diversifolia-subsp-diversifolia/>

PDF DATE

08 June 2026