

Simplicia laxa

COMMON NAMES

simplicia

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: Sp, DPR, DPS, DPT, RR

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION

Feeble, inconspicuous mat-forming grass of shaded habitats. Plants rooting at nodes. Leaf sheaths hairy. Inflorescences inconspicuous, delicate, pyramidal; flowering branches hairy, basal branches usually reflexed and spreading. Spikelets one-flowered, bearing prominent hairy lemma and much reduced, minute scale-like glumes.

FLOWER COLOURS

Green



Spikelet showing glume and utricle. Wairarapa.
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:
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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Plants trailing forming thick sprawling mats or diffuse interconnected patches up to 0.6 m across. **Culms** 0.40–0.80 m long, green to pale green when fresh, wiry, decumbent, with the apices weakly erect, culm internodes 4–8, elongated, sparsely (sometimes densely) hairy, or glabrous; hairs weakly flexuous, patent up 0.18 mm long; internodes usually shorter than subtending leaf-sheaths. **Culm-nodes** conspicuously swollen when fresh, maroon-black to black (0.13–)0.18–0.30 mm long, rooting freely on contact with ground. **Basal leaf-sheaths** glossy light brown to amber, membranous, ribbed, abaxially (often copiously) pubescent on ribs (and usually on interstices), hairs 0.20–0.25(–0.30) mm long, patent to retrorse; mid stem and upper leaf-sheaths pale-green to green, membranous, ribbed, abaxially pubescent on ribs (and sometimes on interstices), hairs copious, 0.35–0.40 mm long patent, mostly straight, sometimes curved or weakly flexuous. **Ligule** 2.8–3.5–(10) mm, membranous, lanceolate, apex erose to very deeply lacerate; abaxially sparsely to copiously hairy; hairs 0.20–0.24 mm long. **Leaf-blade** (100)–160–(200) × (2.8)–3.0–(3.6) mm, green to dark green, flat, linear-lanceolate, finely ribbed; adaxial ribs finely pubescent, abaxially glabrous (sometimes sparsely hairy at leaf base; margins ± smooth, sometimes irregularly finely scabrid and sparsely hairy. **Panicle** (40)–100–(150) mm long, linear to ± pyramidal, usually with basal branch or branch pair reflexed (often unevenly so); rachis glabrous, branches (20)–40–(60) mm long, finely, antrorsely hairy (hairs 0.20–0.25 mm long), binate, initially contracted but as inflorescences mature, spreading to reflexed, devoid of spikelets in lower half; pedicels appressed to branchlets, 1.00–1.06 mm long, finely pubescent. **Spikelets** 2.8–3.2 mm, 1-flowered, lanceolate, light green. **Glumes** pale green (± hyaline), glabrous, broadly ovate-lanceolate to ovate, acute, 1-nerved, nerve extending beyond apex as a minute mucro, lower glume margins entire (sometimes with apex erose), ciliate towards apex, upper glume margins usually erose (sometimes subentire), ciliate; lower glume 0.5–0.8 mm, upper glume 0.75–1.0–(1.2) mm. **Lemma** 2.8–3.2–(3.4) mm, light green to grey-green (sometimes purple-green), ± evenly, densely pubescent, lanceolate, acute, apex mucronate (mucro 0.10–0.25 mm long), 3–(5)-nerved (nerves obscured by hairs); lemma hairs antrorse appressed, sericeous, 0.12–0.13 mm long. **Palea** 2.4–2.8 mm, lanceolate, pale green to green, pubescent, 1–2-nerved, (nerves obscured by hairs). **Rachilla** prolongation 1.25–1.30 mm, narrowly lanceolate, hyaline, margins minutely ciliate. **Stamens** 3. **Filaments** 0.20–0.25 mm long, hyaline. **Anthers** 0.30–0.45 mm, yellow. **Ovary** narrowly ovoid to weakly trigonous 1.0–1.25 mm long, dark green, ± glabrous (basal portion sometimes minutely ciliate); styles apical, 1.10–1.25 mm, hyaline; stigmas plumose, white. **Caryopsis** 1.4–1.5 mm long, laterally compressed, orange-brown when mature.

SIMILAR TAXA

Allied to *Simplicia felix* from which it is distinguished by the mid-stem and upper stem leaf sheaths finely ribbed and copiously hairy; by the hairy adaxial leaf-blade ribs; by the antrorsely hairy inflorescence branches, longer pedicels 1.00–1.06 mm long and pubescent lemma (see de Lange et al. 2016). *Simplicia felix* and *S. laxa* differ from *S. buchananii* by the decumbent rather than tufted growth habit, spreading to weakly ascendent rather than erect culms, by the nodes which root freely (plants thus forming interconnected widely sprawling clonal patches) and by the linear to pyramidal, binate inflorescences, whose basal branch or branches are reflexed, and devoid of spikelets from lower half or so (see de Lange et al. 2016).

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island—Otago with one site at Honeycomb Cave, Karamea (de Lange et al. 2016).

HABITAT

Simplicia laxa has been recorded from coastal to subalpine situations on base-rich rocks such as limestone, schist and basalt. All current populations grow on rock ledges, within crevices, overhangs and at cave entrances. It is suspected that the current habitats of *Simplicia laxa* are refugia, and that the species was once found in forested habitats (see de Lange et al. 2016).

THREATS

Currently known from < 15 populations. Several of these are in decline, and very few are substantial in size. Many occur on private land without direct conservation management or in places subject to ongoing habitat deterioration through invasive weed pressure and habitat loss (for more information see de Lange et al. 2016).

GENUS

Simplicia

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Simplicia laxa Kirk

SYNONYMS

Simplicia laxa Kirk var. *laxa*

TAXONOMIC NOTES

North Island *Simplicia* occurrences discussed by Ogle (2010) and Smissen et al. (2011) together with one North Otago population now belong to a third species *S. felix* (de Lange et al. 2016). As far as is known *Simplicia laxa* is not present in the North Island, the specimens Kirk collected from the Wairarapa belong to *S. felix* (de Lange 2016; de Lange et al. 2016).

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

Yes

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

FLOWERING

November–March

FRUITING

January–May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from rooted pieces. Can be grown from node cuttings. Often difficult to maintain in cultivation, and short-lived. It does best in a dry shady site, and should be planted in a free draining, lime-enriched soil.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

This plant has been featured as a Plant of the Month – see [Trilepidea: NZPCN newsletter for January 2010](#) for the full story.

ETYMOLOGY

laxa: Slack, loose

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

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

NVS CODE

SIMLAX

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 28

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, RR, Sp

2012 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, Sp

2009 | Threatened – Nationally Critical | Qualifiers: CD, Sp

2004 | Threatened – Nationally Endangered

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Critical | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, NR, NStr, PF, RF, Sp, TL [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

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ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (1 November 2009). Description from de Lange et al. (2016) For more information see Kirk (1897), Zotov (1971), Edgar & Connor (2000), and de Lange et al (2010).

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NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Simplicia laxa* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/simplicia-laxa/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/simplicia-laxa/>

PDF DATE

27 May 2026