

# Spinifex sericeus

## COMMON NAME

spinifex, kōwhangatara

## SYNONYMS

New Zealand plants have long been referred to *Spinifex hirstutus* Labill. a species that is now considered quite unrelated and confined to Western Australia

## FAMILY

Poaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Spinifex sericeus* R.Br.

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

## NVS CODE

SPISER

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

$2n = 18$

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | Not Threatened

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. Common throughout New Zealand. Also present in Australia

## HABITAT

Strictly coastal where it is confined to sandy beaches. This is the main dune forming indigenous plant in New Zealand. It is usually found at the front of actively accumulating foredunes. It does not tolerate stable dune systems and does not compete well with other introduced dune plants.



New Chums beach, Whangapoua, February.  
Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth



New Chums beach, Whangapoua, February.  
Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth

## FEATURES

Stoloniferous, often forming colonies stretching to 80-(160) m along sand dunes, with much-branched, knotted, rope-like, hard, creeping culms. Leaf-sheath leathery, strongly-nerved, silky-hairy. Ligule minute, ciliate, hairs very dense to 6 mm. Leaf-blade c.300 mm, inrolled and c.1.5 mm diameter, leathery, strongly nerved, silky-villous. Culm 2.5-6.0 mm diameter, internodes glabrous, silky-villous below inflorescence. Dioecious\*: male inflorescence with numerous pedunculate racemes, 0-120 mm, bearing up to 15 silky-villous spikelets, each terminated by a short bristle c.10 mm; raceme clusters subtended by spathaceous bracts; raceme. Male spikelets 100 mm; glumes; spikelet, 7-9-nerved; lemmas similar to glumes but less villous, 5-nerved; each floret with 2 emarginate lodicules 0.6 x 0.3 mm, and 3 pollen-filled anthers to 6 mm. Female inflorescence very conspicuous, globular, appearing spiny with strict bracts to 150 mm, disarticulating from culm at maturity and wheeling along sand; spikelets solitary, hidden at base of bract, 15-18 mm; glumes equal to spikelet, 5-7-nerved, silky-villous; lemmas shorter, less villous, rather chartaceous, 3-5-nerved; lower floret sterile; upper floret female, larger, with 2 lodicules c.1 x 1 mm, and 3 stamens with stout filaments bearing white, pollen less anthers up to 1.5 mm; ovary 1.5-2.0 mm, stigma-styles 17-20 mm; seed free, c. 4.5-5.0 x 2.5 mm. \* but stems with both male and female flowers are known

## SIMILAR TAXA

None - the distinctive softly spiny female seed heads, which disarticulate and are usually seen rolling down the beach readily identify this species.

## FLOWERING

September - December

## FLOWER COLOURS

White

## FRUITING

November - May

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed (which is best). Can be grown from layered pieces but often slow to start and fickle. Does best when planted directly into sand dunes - not a good plant for the average garden.

## WHERE TO BUY

Sold by a number of specialist native plant nurseries. Popular plant for dune restoration.

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (June 2005). Description adapted from Edgar and Connor (2000).

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Edgar, E.; Connor H.E. 2000: Flora of New Zealand. Vol. 5. Landcare Research, Christchurch.  
Gardner, R. 1999. *Spinifex sericeus* in Auckland. Auckland Botanical Society Journal, 54: 36

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/spinifex-sericeus/>