

Urtica aspera

SYNONYMS

None

FAMILY

Urticaceae

AUTHORITY

Urtica aspera Petrie

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

NVS CODE

URTASP

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 24

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DP

2004 | Sparse

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island, eastern from Marlborough (upper Awatere and Clarence) south to Central Otago.

HABITAT

Usually montane to subalpine (>300 m a.s.l.) in short tussock grassland, grey scrub, often in and around boulders, rock tors, at the base of cliffs, on rock ledges or at the back of shallow rock overhangs. Sometimes at low altitudes in pasture or along river flats. This species seems to prefer dry sites to wet ones though it is very shade tolerant.

FEATURES

Stout, erect, suberect to trailing, tufted, some shaggy-looking, grey-green, pale green to yellow-green, dioecious herb up to 400 x 600 mm, woody at base, rhizomatous, widely spreading, often forming discrete clonal patches. All parts usually densely clad in shortly stalked, fine, stinging hairs (such that plants often appear to be fuzzed/shaggy due to sting density) sometimes markedly less so, otherwise sparsely hairy. Stipules 4 per node, up to 10 mm long, entire. Petioles 10-40(-60) mm long. Leaves 20-40(-60) x 10-40 mm, grey-green, green to yellow-green (very rarely dark green), broadly ovate, elliptic, rarely broadly lanceolate, subcordate, truncate to cuneate at base, obtusely to acutely serrated; teeth 5 mm, acute, sinus acute. Inflorescences axillary spikes up to 50 mm long, perianth-segments glabrate; staminate spikes usually widely-spaced, distant clusters, pistillate approximate. Perianth green, 4-partite, free at base, female flowers with perianths unequally divided, 2 largest enclosing achene, male flowers with 4 equal perianth segments, greenish-yellow. Achene 1-.5 mm, ellipsoid to ovoid, pale brown.



Urtica aspera, Hawkdun Range. Photographer: John Barkla



Urtica aspera - Upper Manuherika Valley. Photographer: John Barkla

SIMILAR TAXA

Close to *U. incisa* Poiret from which it differs by its preference for usually montane to subalpine, dry situations, usually within a free draining substrate, and ovate to elliptic, serrated leaves, and usually copious covering of white, stalked stinging hairs, thus imparting a somewhat shaggy appearance to plants. Some plants that are much less sting covered superficially resemble *U. dioica* L. and these can best be separated by the basal stalk of the stinging hair being much less in length than the tip. Flora 4 states that *U. aspera* is not rhizomatous - this is incorrect as it is often widely rhizomatous a feature seen also in the introduced *U. dioica*.

FLOWERING

October - January

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

FRUITING

November - May

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed, stem cuttings and rooted pieces. Does well in a dry, sunny, fertile, free draining soil. Not likely to be widely cultivated on account of its very painful sting.

THREATS

An apparently naturally widely distributed and biologically sparse species. No immediate threats are obvious though it has been recorded hybridising with other indigenous *Urtica* species. It is unclear whether it has undergone any decline though it has not been recorded from the northern part of its range for a very long time - though it may have been overlooked or confused with introduced nettle species.

ETYMOLOGY

urtica: From the Latin verb *urere* which means "to burn"

aspera: From the Latin *asper* 'rough', meaning rough or covered with hard short rigid points

WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange for NZPCN (1 June 2013)

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/urtica-aspera/>