

# Urtica australis

## COMMON NAME

Southern nettle, onga (Chatham I. only)

## SYNONYMS

*Urtica aucklandica* Hook.f.

## FAMILY

Urticaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Urtica australis* Hook.f.

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Dicotyledonous Herbs other than Composites

## NVS CODE

URTAUS

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

$2n = 24$

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | Not Threatened

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic to the South western Fiordland Coast, Stewart, Chatham and other main subantarctic islands.

## HABITAT

Abundant in coastal scrub and forest, favouring open ground, such as forest margins, open ground amongst scrub and grasses, and also cobble beaches and sand dunes. Common in damaged forest on the main Chatham Island.



South East Island, Chathams. Feb 1985.  
Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe



*Urtica australis*. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth

## FEATURES

Stout semi-deciduous shrub forming dense bushes up to 1 x 1 m. Branches semi-erect to erect, rooting at base up to 1 x 0.1 m, somewhat woody at base, semi-succulent. Young branchlets, petioles and inflorescence axes sparsely to densely clad in stinging hairs, these sometimes completely absent from stems. Interpetiolar stipules lanceolate, usually bifid, 20 mm long. Petioles up to 50 mm long, stout, somewhat fleshy, often with a pair of lateral leaflets developed near petiole base. Leaves dark green, 100-150 x 80-140 mm, broadly ovate-cordate to suborbicular, acute to obtuse, coarsely dentate-serrate to subentire (rarely entire), teeth up to 10 mm long, stinging hairs confined to leaf margins and veins on leaf underside, often sparse or absent. Male inflorescence of 1-3 branched spikes up to 70 mm long; female inflorescence similar, flowers densely arranged, perianth in both sexes glabrate. Achenes (Seeds), pale brown, elliptic 1.5-2 mm.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Easily distinguished from all other indigenous and naturalised nettles by the broadly ovate, dark green leaves, 100-200 mm long, and stout shrubby semi-deciduous habit. It could perhaps be confused with the naturalised *U. dioica* but that species is distinctly long rhizomatous and has so far not been recorded from within the known range of *U. australis*. In New Zealand at least, both species can be easily distinguished by their chromosome number  $2n = 24$  in *U. australis* and  $2n = 48$  in *U. dioica*.

## FLOWERING

December - January

## FRUITING

December - March

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed or by the division of root pieces. Dislikes drought and/or high humidity. Plants in these conditions are prone to sudden collapse. Because of the painful stings it is rarely grown. It is an ideal host plant for the red admiral butterfly (this species is the only known host plant for the endemic Chatham Island red admiral).

## THREATS

Not Threatened Uncommon on Stewart Island. A cursed weed on the Chatham Islands. Relishes disturbance and is virtually untouched by large browsing animals.

## ETYMOLOGY

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

**australis:** Southern

## WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available.

## ATTRIBUTION

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

## CITATION

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## MORE INFORMATION

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