Urtica perconfusa

COMMON NAMES
swamp nettle

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: Sp
Jump to previous conservation statuses

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Scrambling to sprawling, much-branched herb forming patches up to 2 m long. All parts covered in stinging hairs (these conspicuous but sparse on leaves). Leaves narrow, 40–100 × 4–10 mm, margins sharply toothed. Flowers green to reddish, clustered in short spikes in leaf axils.

Upper surface of leaf base (almost glabrous) and stinging hairs on petiole. Kaitoke Lake, Whanganui. Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Date taken: 01/04/2012, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWER COLOURS
Green, Red/Pink

Urtica perconfusa. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Lianoid, slender, perennial, rhizomatous herb 0.45–2.0 m, usually much-branched, scrambling or climbing. Stem indumentum of few stinging hairs with pluricellular base c. 0.2–0.5 mm overall and erect setae 0.2–0.4 mm long and few simple trichomes 0.2–0.3 mm long. Leaf lamina 40–100 × 4–10 mm narrowly ovate; surface sparsely pubescent with short simple trichomes 0.2–0.5 mm long and few stinging hairs (abaxially only on the veins), adaxially with punctiform cystoliths; leaf base rounded; margins regularly dentate, rarely doubly dentate, with 12–20 teeth on each side; leaf apex acuminate; lamina thinly membranaceous; stipules free (4 per node) 2–4 mm long; petioles thin, flexuose, 15–45 mm long. Plants monoecious. Staminate flowers with tepals c. 1.3–1.8 mm long. Pistillate flowers with short tepals 0.5–0.8 mm long and long tepals 0.8–1.2 mm long, sparsely pubescent, esetulose. Inflorescence glomerulous, 3–10 mm long, usually shorter than petioles. Mature fruit with longer tepals 1.2–1.5 mm long, achenes subcircular in outline, rounded at base and at the tip, laterally flattened, c. 1.2–2.0 × 0.8–1.3 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA
Easily distinguished from all other New Zealand nettles (Urtica) by the vine-like (lianoid) stems, sprawling growth habit, narrowly ovate leaves with rounded bases and by the inflorescences which are glomerulose, and 3–10 mm long

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. New Zealand - and North and South Island s from the Central North Island south.

HABITAT
Fertile, lowland swamps, lakes and river margins, swampy shrubland and forest, often growing over tree stumps and rushes or through dense sedges such as swards of Carex secta.

THREATS
A sparsely distributed species of lowland to montane lake margins and fertile to semi-fertile wetlands. Easily overlooked because of its penchant for grow at the base of *Carex secta* trunks, or threaded through *Phormium tenax*. Being an adaptable species it is often found within willow (*Salix* spp.) car, sometimes as a low epiphyte on willow trunks. In all these habitats it is at risk from wetland clearance, drainage and also the spread of weeds such as wandering jew (*Tradescantia fluminensis*). Some large populations in the Horowhenua have been destroyed by the canalisation of streams and through willow control.

GENUS
Urtica

FAMILY
Urticaceae

AUTHORITY
Urtica perconfusa Grosse-Veldmann et Weigend

SYNONYMS
Urtica incisa var. linearifolia Hook.f.; Urtica linearifolia (Hook.f.) Cockayne

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
Flowering occurs throughout the year

FRUITING
Fruits may be found throughout the year

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Very easy from rooted pieces, stem cuttings and fresh seed. Often spontaneously self-sows in cultivation.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACW: Facultative Wetland
Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

CULTIVATION
Not commercially available. Some plants are held by specialist native plant growers and botanic gardens. An attractive plant but with a vicious sting! Will hybridise readily with *U. aspera* and *U. sykesii*. Such hybrids have been collected from the wild and in cultivation.

ETYMOLOGY
urtica: From the Latin verb urere which means “to burn”

NVS CODE
URTLIN

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 24

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp
2012 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp
2009 | At Risk – Declining | Qualifiers: Sp
2004 | Gradual Decline
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2025 | Regionally Threatened – Regionally Endangered | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, PF, RR, Sp, St 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

Grosse-Veldmann, B.; Conn, B.J.; Weigend, M. 2016: Weeding the nettles IV: A redefinition of *Urtica incisa* and allies in New Zealand and Australia, including the segregation of two new species *Urtica sykesii* and *U. perconfusa*. Phytotaxa 245(4): 251-261.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet by Peter J. de Lange (15 February 2016). Description based on Grosse-Veldmann et al. (2016).

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/urtica-perconfusa/

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