

Urtica sykesii

COMMON NAME

native nettle, bush nettle

SYNONYMS

Previously confused with *Urtica incisa* Poir. See under 'Taxonomic Notes' below

FAMILY

Urticaceae

AUTHORITY

Urtica sykesii Grosse-Veldmann et Weigend

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

NVS CODE

URTINC

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 24

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2012 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Delicate, usually much-branched herb covered in prominent stinging hairs. Leaves green, deeply incised, triangular-ovate with subcordate leaf bases. Plants bearing both male and female flowers.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. Australia and New Zealand. In New Zealand widespread in the North and South Islands though scarce north of Auckland. Seemingly confined to Victoria in Eastern Australia.



Cobb. January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth



Korokoro Stream, Lower Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy Rolfe

FEATURES

Erect, perennial, rhizomatous herb 0.15–0.60 m with elongating rhizomes, aerial stems usually unbranched. Stem indumentum of very few stinging hairs with pluricellular base c. 0.2–0.5 mm overall and erect setae 1.3–2.2 mm long and very few simple trichomes 0.2–0.3 mm long. Leaf lamina 20–60 × 20–50 mm triangular to triangular-ovate; surface very sparsely pubescent with short simple trichomes 0.2–0.5 mm long and very few stinging hairs (abaxially only on the veins), adaxially with punctiform cystoliths; leaf base truncate to subcordate; margins regularly dentate with 9–10(–12) teeth on each side; leaf apex acute to acuminate; lamina light greenish; stipules free (4 per node) 2–10 mm long; petioles 30–70 mm long. Plants monoecious; lowest inflorescences pure male, upper ones pure female. Staminate flowers with tepals c. 1.2–1.8 mm long. Pistillate flowers with short tepals 0.5–0.7 mm long and long tepals 0.9–1.1 mm long, sparsely pubescent, esetulose. Inflorescence 10–20 mm. Mature fruit with longer tepals 1.3–1.5 mm long, achenes subcircular in outline, rounded at base and at the tip, laterally flattened, c. 1.2–1.5 × 0.8–1 mm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Distinguished from other New Zealand *Urtica* by the triangular-ovate leaves with subcordate bases, which are 20–60 mm long; usually moderately to densely setose (hairy) on the stems and leaves; and by the monoecious flowers, with male flowers arranged below the female flowers

FLOWERING

Throughout the year

FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Yellow

FRUITING

Throughout the year

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from rooted pieced, stem cuttings and fresh seed. Flourishes in a shady, moist soil. Inclined to be short-lived. The impact of the stinging hairs seems to vary from plant to plant and in the way people react to them. Generally this species has a less painful sting than our other indigenous *Urtica*

ETYMOLOGY

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

sykesii: Named after William Russell Sykes (1927–2018) an English born botanist who emigrated to New Zealand in the late 1960s and worked for the DSIR Botany Division and DSIR Land Resources. Sykes specialised in the taxonomy of cultivated plants, naturalised plants and made studies of the South Pacific Islands, especially the Kermadec and Cook Island groups.

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Urtica sykesii is the species previously treated (incorrectly it transpires see Grosse-Veldmann et al. 2016) by New Zealand botanists as *Urtica incisa* Poir., an Australian species that is sparingly naturalised in New Zealand (where it had previously, incorrectly, been treated as *U. dioica* subsp. *gracilis* (Webb et al. 1988)).

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (14 February 2016). Description based on Grosse-Veldmann et al. (2016).

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.

Webb CJ, Sykes WR, Garnock-Jones PJ 1988. *Flora of New Zealand*. Vol. IV. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

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