

Carex comans

COMMON NAMES

sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tufts very dense, very leafy, red, yellow-green, or lime-green. **Culms** 60–400 mm long, < 1 mm diameter, terete, glabrous, flaccid, occasionally much elongating at maturation of fruit and drooping to the ground; basal sheaths dull brown to purple-black. **Leaves** usually > culms, 0.5–1.5 mm wide, drooping above, concavo-convex, adaxial surface matt, abaxial surface more deeply coloured and shining, margins scabrid, tips rarely curled. **Spikes** 4–8, linear-oblong; terminal 1–(2) spikes male, very slender; remaining spikes female occasionally with a few male flowers at the base, 5–25 × 3–4 mm, distant, the uppermost 1–2 sessile, the lower on filiform peduncles, often drooping. **Glumes** (excluding awn) often slightly < utricles, ovate-lanceolate, usually emarginate to more deeply bifid at the top with a rather short scabrid awn, light brown or reddish brown with a paler midrib, membranous. **Utricles** 2.5–3.5 × c. 1.0 mm, unequally biconvex to ± plano-convex, lanceolate, elliptic-lanceolate or ovate-lanceolate, reddish brown, pale straw-coloured at the base, obscurely ribbed on both faces, becoming smooth when fully mature, lateral nerves usually prominent, margins of upper half sharply serrate, narrowed above to a bifid beak c. 1 mm long, with slender scabrid crura. **Stigmas** 3. **Nut** 1.5–2 mm. long, trigonous, ovoid to oblong-ovoid, dark brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

Carex comans is a very distinct species easily recognised by its densely tufted growth habit, narrow, concavo-convex leaves, slender light brown pedunculate spikes and the sharply toothed utricle-beaks with long crura. It is most similar to, and most often confused with *C. albula* Allan and *C. fretalis* Hamlin. *Carex albula* is best distinguished from *C. comans* by the usually stiffly erect growth habit, pale foliage colour, and pale cream glumes. However some *C. albula* plants can also appear green or red and can be distinguished from *C. comans* only by the pale glume with small red flecks and by the obvious vein towards the margin of the outer face of the utricle. *Carex fretalis* is very closely related to *Carex comans* Bergg., from which it differs by the usually pale yellow-green leaves with strongly curled (cirrhose) apices, and light brown, never purple-brown basal sheaths. The inflorescence of *C. fretalis* tends to be shorter and more stiffly erect and the spikes fewer, broader and with larger, usually glabrous utricles, which have a scarcely narrowed, usually glabrous beak rather than the distinct, and very scabrid beak seen in *C. comans*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North, South and Stewart Islands.

HABITAT

Coastal to subalpine. Usually in free draining soils either in the open or under scrub or tall forest in relatively open sparsely vegetated situations. It often naturalises in urban areas.



Two female spikes and male spike. In cultivation. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 14/12/2007, Licence: CC BY.



Green form. Naturalised at Auckland. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 26/10/2007, Licence: CC BY.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

THREATS

Not Threatened - often naturalised in urban areas

DETAILED TAXONOMY

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex comans Bergg.

SYNONYMS

Carex pulchella Bergg., *C. cheesemanii* Petrie, *C. comans* var. *pulchella* (Bergg.) C.B.Clarke in Cheeseman, *C. comans* var. *cheesemanii* (Petrie) Kük.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

Throughout the year

FRUITING

Throughout the year

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL

Nuts surrounded by inflated utricles are dispersed by granivory and wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from fresh seed and by division of established plants. Three colour forms exist, the red and green forms are the most widely cultivated. Often naturalises in urban areas and at times can become invasive. Tolerant of a wide range of conditions except permanently waterlogged soils. However does best in full sun in a free draining soil.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).

OTHER INFORMATION

CULTIVATION

Commonly available from mainline and specialist native plant nurseries. *Carex comans* is very variable, and red and green colour forms are known. Some confusion exists around the cultivar *C. comans* cv. Frosted Curls which, at least in the original form is actually *C. fetalis* Hamlin. However, many plants now sold as that cultivar are now the green-form of *C. comans*.

ETYMOLOGY

carex: Latin name for a species of sedge, now applied to the whole group.

comans: Like a luxurious head of hair

NVS CODE

CARCOM

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 40

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES

Otago: 2024 | Regionally Not Threatened

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 p.

Thorsen MJ, Dickinson KJM, Seddon PJ. 2009. Seed dispersal systems in the New Zealand flora. *Perspectives in Plant Ecology, Evolution and Systematics 11*: 285–309.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970) Some of this factsheet information is derived from [Flora of New Zealand Online](#) and is used under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand](#) licence.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Carex comans* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-comans/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/carex-comans/>

PDF DATE

10 March 2025