

Carex dipsacea

COMMON NAMES

teasel sedge

BIOSTATUS

Native – Endemic taxon

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Tufts dense, harsh, 0.25–1.00 m tall, light green, dark green, red-green or orange. **Culms** 0.5–2.0 mm diameter, trigonous or subtrigonous, smooth or occasionally slightly scabrid towards inflorescence; basal sheaths dark brown, red-, yellow-, or grey-brown, nerves \pm distinct. **Leaves** numerous, $>$ culms, 1.5–2.5 mm wide, channelled, margins closely scabrid. **Spikes** 4–8, upper approximate, \pm sessile, lower 1–3 usually more distant, shortly pedunculate, erect; terminal spike male, occasionally with female flowers intermixed, remaining spikes female, often male at base; lower spikes 10–40 \times 4–6 mm, upper spikes progressively smaller. **Glumes** \pm = or slightly $<$ utricles, orbicular-ovate, obtuse, membranous, creamy brown or darker flecked, midrib light brown, 3-nerved, not reaching margin or in some glumes produced to a very short mucro. **Utricles** 2.0–2.8 \times c. 1.5 mm, crowded on spike, spreading when ripe, unequally biconvex or almost plano-convex, elliptic-ovoid, yellow-brown at base, upper half with darker red-brown markings and usually scabrid margins, shining, smooth, abruptly narrowed to a small cream bifid beak c. 0.2 mm. long, margins and orifice faintly scabrid. **Stigmas** 2. **Nut** slightly $>$ 1 mm long, biconvex, ellipsoid, cream at first, later very dark brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

Carex dipsacea superficially resembles an upright form of *C. flagellifera* Colenso or *C. testacea* Sol. ex Boott especially as three species possess channelled leaves. However the leaves of *C. dipsacea* are usually much wider, and the utricles are biconvex, only minutely beaked, and spreading widely when ripe (somewhat resembling a miniature teasel plant (*Dipsacus fulionum* L.)—hence the specific epithet). The glumes of *C. dipsacea* are \pm orbicular, and are scarcely or not awned in contrast to the distinctly awned glumes of *C. flagellifera* and *C. testacea*.

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand: North and South Islands. Widespread from about the northern Waikato South. Naturalised around Auckland City

HABITAT

Coastal to subalpine. Favouring wetlands this species usually grows along rivers, lakes and ponds within sand dunes, tall forest, shrubland, and tussock grassland.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened

[Jump to previous conservation statuses](#)

DETAILED TAXONOMY



Lake Westmere, Whanganui. Feb 2013.
Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Female and male (top of stem) heads. Lake Westmere, Whanganui. Feb 2013.
Photographer: Colin C. Ogle, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Carex dipsacea Bergg.

SYNONYMS

None

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Carex tahoata Hamlin is regarded by many botanists as distinct from *C. dipsacea*. In the field it appears distinctive but as observed by Edgar in Moore & Edgar (1970) there does seem to be a gradation between it and *C. dipsacea*. As the key differences between both species are mostly size related, and no other differences seem stable, it is probably better to regard *C. tahoata* as a reduced phenotype of *C. dipsacea*. However, further research into the matter is needed.

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

October–December

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 the division of whole plants. Will tolerate most conditions, but does best in full sun in a permanently damp soil. In ideal conditions this species often naturalises, and it can at times become invasive. Along with *C. buchananii* Bergg., *C. comans* Bergg. and *C. dissita* Sol. ex Boott this is one of the most commonly cultivated indigenous sedges. This species is often sold as *C. dissita* cv. Bronze Warrior.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

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

OTHER INFORMATION

CULTIVATION

Commonly available from general plant nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY

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

dipsacea: Teasel-like (spikes)

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

[Key to indigenous and naturalised Carex in New Zealand](#)

NVS CODE

CARDIP

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = c.74

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 | At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT, RR, Sp 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 [“Regional conservation status of indigenous vascular plants in Otago”](#) Jarvie S et al. (2024) report.

Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Data Deficient Help

The regional threat classification system leverages off the national assessments in the NZTCS, providing information relevant for the regional context. Auckland conservation status information is sourced from the [“Conservation status of vascular plant species in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland”](#) Simpkins E et al. (2025) report.

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 for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (10 August 2006). Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

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

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