Gratiola sexdentata

COMMON NAMES
Gratiola

BIOSTATUS
Native – Endemic taxon

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

FLOWER COLOURS
White, Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Terrestrial to semi-aquatic glabrous to finely viscid-pubescent, erect to widely spreading perennial herb forming patches up to 300 x 300 mm. Stems mostly erect, stout, sparingly to heavily though laxly branched from base, dark purple or maroon often with dark spots or green with purple spots (rarely completely green). Leaves sessile to subsessile, opposite, 6-30 x 4-16 mm; dark green above with purple stitch marks along lamina (rarely bright green without stitch marks), undersides paler, often purple spotted; lamina ovate to lanceolate or suboblong, very rarely linear-lanceolate, margins entire, subentire or with distant fine, triangular-teeth. Flowers axillary on slender peduncles up to 10 mm long. Calyx-lobes 4-6 mm long, darkly purple-green, often with darker spots, or bright green; narrow-lanceolate, more or less attenuate, obtuse, to narrow ovate-lanceolate. Corolla 10-16 mm long, with corolla tube 8-14 mm long and corolla lips < tube; externally white often with a yellowish base, internally with a yellow throat, usually with 4-8 fine purple lines extending from lips to corolla base; rarely corolla completely white. Anthers connivent, cells parallel, transverse; staminodes filiform. Capsule c.5 mm long; dark purple-green with dark spotting or bright green, drying greyish; more or less ovoid-globose, initially fleshy, maturing chartaceous. Seeds numerous.

SIMILAR TAXA
Has been much confused with the South American G. peruviana and Australian G. latifolia but it does not seem to be close to either of these species, differing consistently by its smaller, ovate-lanceolate leaves with purple stitch marks along the margins, dark purple spotted glabrous to hairy stems, and longer, larger flowers. However, further study is needed. From the other New Zealand species it could perhaps be confused with G. pubescens but that species has all its vegetative parts covered in fine viscid hair. G. pedunculata is similar but has smaller pedicellate flowers, glandular sticky indumentum, no purple stitch marks on the leaves, and much smaller flowers. Small forms of G. concinna have also been confused with it.

DISTRIBUTION
Endemic. Widespread throughout the North and South Islands, can be locally common but often absent from large parts of the country

Gratiola sexdentata on lake margin, southern Pouto Peninsula. Photographer: A. J. Townsend, Date taken: 06/04/2010, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Gratiola sexdentata. Photographer: John Barkla, Licence: CC BY.

HABITAT
Lake, pond, tarn and river margins where it grows in marginal turf communities or on recently exposed mud or silt. Also present in wetlands where it grows along slow flowing streams, in pools of water or amongst sedges and reeds (but only in open sites it dislikes heavy shade). Occasionally collected from muddy pools within alluvial forest.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS
2023 | Not Threatened
Jump to previous conservation statuses

DETAILED TAXONOMY

GENUS
Gratiola

FAMILY
Plantaginaceae

AUTHORITY
Gratiola sexdentata A.Cunn.

SYNONYMS
Gratiola glandulifera Colenso

TAXONOMIC NOTES
Gratiola sexdentata - as currently circumscribed remains a highly variable species and this variation warrants further study.

ENDEMIC TAXON
Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING
Year round

FRUITING
Year round

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Mucilaginous seeds are dispersed by water and possibly wind and attachment (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easy from fresh seed, rooted pieces or stem cuttings. Needs to grow in water.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
OBL: Obligate Wetland
Almost always is a hydrophyte, rarely in uplands (non-wetlands).

OTHER INFORMATION

ETYMOLOGY
gratiola: Little beauty

NVS CODE
GRASEX

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 90

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: DPR, 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 | Threatened – Regionally Vulnerable | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR, Sp 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
Thorsen, M. J.; Dickinson, K. J. M.; Seddon, P. J. 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 4 May 2006. Description by P.J. de Lange

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION
Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): Gratiola sexdentata Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/gratiola-sexdentata/ (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/gratiola-sexdentata/

PDF DATE
24 September 2025