Epilobium pallidiflorum

COMMON NAMES
tarawera, swamp willowherb

BIOSTATUS
Native

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

SIMPLIFIED DESCRIPTION
Robust rhizomatous perennial herb 0.25–1.4 m tall, often well branched from the base and above,

FLOWER COLOURS
Violet/Purple, White

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
forming leafy stolons from near the base that become evident in relatively open sites; plants strigulose, densely so in the inflorescence, the stems strigulose all round or rarely only on the elevated lines running down from the margins of the petioles. Leaves mostly opposite, alternate in and near the inflorescence, dark green, somewhat shining, minutely strigulose along the margins and veins, the lateral veins prominent, usually 4 on each side of the midrib, narrowly lanceolate to lanceolate, attenuate at the apex, attenuate to acute at the base 30–800 × 5–13 mm, serrulate, with usually 8-28 teeth on each side subsessile. Inflorescence gracefully nodding to one side. Flowers erect. Ovaries densely strigulose, 15–30mm long, on a pedicel 4 × 10 mm long. Floral tube 1.3–2.0 × 1.5–2.8 mm, bearing a conspicuous ring of long hairs within. Sepals keeled, 4.5–8.0 × 1.3–2.0mm, strigulose. Petals 7.5–14.0 × 5.0-10.0 mm, notch 1.0-2.8 mm, deep white, often flushed with pink after fertilisation. Anthers 1.2-1.5 × 0.6-0.8 mm, cream; filaments of longer stamens 3.0-6.5 mm long, those of shorter stamens 1.5-3.5 mm, white. Style, 4.5-9.15 mm long, white, usually with scattered long hairs near the base; stigma 2.5-4.4 × 1.0-1.8 mm, white, clavate, obscurely 4-lobed at the summit, surrounded by the anthers of the longer stamens or held well above them at anthesis. Capsule 45-95 mm long, on pedicel 10-20 mm long. Seeds 0.9-1.0 × 0.4-0.45 mm, brown, papillose, obovoid, coma 5-7 mm long, white or straw-coloured, detaching readily.

SIMILAR TAXA
A distinctive species that is unlikely to be confused with any other indigenous or naturalised Epilobium present in New Zealand. Epilobium pallidiflorum is easily recognised by the tall, erect, well branched stems that may be up to 1.4 m tall; narrowly lanceolate to lanceolate leaves; a stem indumentum of even length glandular hairs; inflorescences with the buds nodding and when flowering with the white flowers mostly erect; shallowly 4-lobed stigma; conspicuously pedicellate capsules; possession of an ovary covered in appressed, strigillose eglandular hairs; and by the seeds which are 0.9-1.0 × 0.4-0.45 mm, and which lack a cellular rim, and are evenly papillose (but with papillae not in lines)

Wairarapa. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 08/04/2007, Licence: CC BY.

Epilobium pallidiflorum. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. New Zealand: North, South and Chatham Islands. Also Australia (New South Wales, Vicoria, South Australia, Tasmania)

HABITAT
Coastal to montane (but mostly coastal and lowland) in swamps and fens or along the banks of slow flowing streams, rivers, ponds, lake margins and around lagoons. Usually in relatively open sites growing amongst sedges (Carex spp.,) rushes (Juncus spp.) and especially raupo (Typha orientialis).

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

DETAILED TAXONOMY

GENUS
Epilobium

FAMILY
Onagraceae

AUTHORITY
Epilobium pallidiflorum A.Cunn.

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING
November - May

FRUITING
December - June

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Minute pappate seeds are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Easily grown from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Does best when planted into a swamp or within a pot partially immersed in a pond. Although flowering plants are reasonably attractive Epilobium pallidiflorum is at best a plant for a specialist native plant grower because it is inclined to get weedy. Epilobium pallidiflorum is however, an excellent plant to establish within wetland restoration plantings where it is ideally suited to the conditions and will have room to spread.

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

OTHER INFORMATION

ETYMOLOGY
epilobium: From the Greek epi- ‘upon’ and lobos ‘a pod’, the flowers appearing to be growing on the seed pod.
pallidiflorum: From the Latin pallidus ‘pale’ and florus ‘flower’, meaning pale-flowered

NVS CODE
EPIPAL

CHROMOSOME NUMBER
2n = 36

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES
2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO
2012 | Not Threatened
2009 | Not Threatened
2004 | Not Threatened
Jump to current conservation status

REGIONAL CONSERVATION STATUSES
Otago: 2024 | At Risk – Regionally Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, RR 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 | At Risk – Regionally Declining | Qualifiers: DPR, DPS, DPT, PF, RR, SO 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
Raven, P.H.; Raven, T.E. 1976: The genus Epilobium in Australasia. New Zealand DSIR Bulletin 216. Wellington, Government Printer.
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 22 August 2011. Description adapted from Raven & Raven (1976).

MORE INFORMATION
https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/epilobium-pallidiflorum/

PDF DATE
23 September 2025