Lepidosperma laterale

COMMON NAMES
sword sedge

BIOSTATUS
Native

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

CATEGORY
Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS
Sedges

DETAILED DESCRIPTION
Coarsely tufted perennial sedge arising from a stout woody rootstock. **Culms** 0.5–2.0 m tall, 4–7 mm wide, rigidly coriaceous, laterally flattened with sharp, minutely scabrid margins to more or less convex above. **Leaves** 3–5 mm wide, similar to culms but usually much shorter, equitant at the base, margins extremely minutely scabrid, apices acuminate. **Panicle** 100–400 mm long, greyish brown when mature, rather narrow, rigidly erect; branches mostly distant, usually simple, erect; lowest bract with a stiff lamina 20–60 mm long, upper bracts shorter, distinctly mucronate, brown to grey-brown. **Spikelets** 6 mm long, distant on the lower branches, fascicled above, 1–4-flowered, only the uppermost flower fertile. **Glumes** 5–7, ovate, acuminate. pubescent towards the apex,the lowest 2–3 empty. **Hypogynous scales** 6, fused at base, each terminated by a fine ciliate seta, this up to ½ length of nut. **Nut** 2.5–3.5 × 1.5–2.0 mm, ovoid, more or less trigonous, the angles thickened, surface at first wrinkled, becoming smooth at maturity, brown; persistent style-base hardly distinguishable from nut, glabrous, brown, with a small black mucro.

Coromandel, January. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

Coromandel, March. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

SIMILAR TAXA
Could be confused with *Machaerina complanata* (Bergg.) Koyama and *Machaerina sinclairii* (Hook.f.) Koyama, and other sedges that have large, flat culms and leaves. However both these species have much wider culms or leaves (up to 30 mm in *Machaerina*) and denser flowered, usually pendulous, often distinctly fluffy inflorescences, and mostly grow in permanently damp situations (such as seepages) or in peat bogs.

DISTRIBUTION
Indigenous. Australian and New Zealand. In New Zealand confined to the North Island where it common from Te Paki south to about the King Country and the Bay of Plenty.

HABITAT
Coastal to lowland, where it usually grows on poorly drained clay soils in gumland scrub, in regenerating forest on steep hill slopes. Sometimes in damp sand such in dune swales and slacks or on sand podzols. Often grows in shrublands dominated by *Kunzea* Rchb. and *Leptospermum* J.R.Forst. et G.Forst..

GENUS
Lepidosperma

FAMILY
Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY
Lepidosperma laterale R.Br.

SYNONYMS
None

ENDEMIC TAXON
No

ENDEMIC GENUS
No

ENDEMIC FAMILY
No

FLOWERING
September–December

FRUITING
October–March (long persistent, usually present all year round)

LIFE CYCLE AND DISPERSAL
Scaly nuts are dispersed by water, wind and possibly ants (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE
Difficult to cultivate. Seed difficult to germinate. Plants resent root disturbance and usually die if transplanted. However, considerable success has been achieved growing plants and germinating seed in untreated saw dust. Nevertheless this is an attractive species to grown in a sunny situation, preferring poorly drained clay soils.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING
FACU: Facultative Upland
Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

WHERE TO BUY
Plants are occasionally available from specialist nurseries.

ETYMOLOGY
lepidosperma: Scale seed

NVS CODE
LEPLAT

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
Auckland: 2025 | Regionally Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DPS, DPT 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.

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

Description adapted from Moore and Edgar (1970)

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MORE INFORMATION

https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lepidosperma-laterale/

PDF DATE

08 July 2026