

Tetragonia trigyna

COMMON NAMES

native spinach

BIOSTATUS

Native

CATEGORY

Vascular

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Lianes & Related Trailing Plants - Dicotyledons

FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Prostrate or scrambling subshrub forming straggling to dense leafy patches up to 4 m long. Stems long trailing, terete, initially somewhat succulent, and often coloured red or pink, maturing dark green to brown-black and becoming woody with age. Leaves alternate, often clustered, sometimes widely spaced along stems, fleshy, papillose; petiole 3-15(-20) mm long; lamina 20-50(-80) × (8-)10-30(-46) mm, ovate-rhomboid to lanceolate, to linear-lanceolate, adaxially dark green, green to almost glaucous, abaxially paler, sometimes flushed pink. Flowers solitary; pedicels slender, 5-30 mm long. Perianth lobes 4, (1.8-)2.8-3.0(-3.6) mm long, oblong, abaxially papillose-hairy, adaxially finely papillose, yellow. Stamens 12-20. Ovary semi-inferior; locules and styles 2(-3). Fruit 5-8 mm long, succulent, pink to dark red, subglobose.

SIMILAR TAXA

Tetragonia trigyna is only ever likely to be confused with the related *T. tetragonoides* (New Zealand spinach) from which it is most reliably distinguished when fruiting by the pink to dark red fleshy, subglobose fruits rather than the dry, leathery obconic and distinctly horned fruits typical of *T. tetragonoides*.

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: Kermadec Islands (Herald Islets, Raoul, Macauley Islands), Three Kings, North, South and Chatham Islands. Also Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands.

HABITAT

Coastal to montane. Mostly found in coastal areas occupying a variety of habitats from cobble and sand beaches through coastal forest and shrubland, also found in exposed windshorn vegetation on cliffs and rock stacks. Occasionally found growing well inland, sometimes in farmland where it grows in barberry (*Berberis* spp.) hedges or on limestone and calcareous sandstone outcrops in otherwise dense forest.

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2023 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

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THREATS

Not Threatened. A widespread and common species throughout most of coastal New Zealand.

DETAILED TAXONOMY

FAMILY

Aizoaceae



Kapiti Island. June 2005. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Licence: CC BY.



Tetragonia implexicoma. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

AUTHORITY

Tetragonia trigyna Banks et Sol. ex Hook.f.

SYNONYMS

Tetragonia implexicoma var. *chathamica* F.Muell.,

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

ECOLOGY

FLOWERING

September - June

FRUITING

September - July

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from rooted pieces, stem cuttings and from fresh fruit. Although edible, *Tetragonia trigyna* has a decidedly less agreeable, more "soapy" taste. Like *T. tetragonoides* this species flourishes in a rich soil and does best grown in full sun. It can be used as a very effective ground cover in coastal situations and can be trained up walls and down cliff faces. It is reasonably drought tolerant but will not stand much frost. In New Zealand the species is highly variable and some populations, notably those from the Kermadec and Three Kings Islands have rather small leaves and a more compact growth habit which might be worth utilizing in cultivation.

OTHER INFORMATION

ETYMOLOGY

tetragonia: Four-angled

NVS CODE

TETTRI

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 32

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: SO

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

[Jump to current conservation status](#)

REFERENCING AND CITATIONS

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 24 October 2011. Description by P.J. de Lange.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/tetragonia-trigyna/>

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01 March 2025