

# Gunnera tinctoria

## COMMON NAME

Chilean rhubarb

## FAMILY

Gunneraceae

## AUTHORITY

*Gunnera tinctoria* (Molina) Mirbel

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Giant rhubarb-like herb, dying back to the large creeping stems over winter, with huge prickly leaves up to 2.5 m tall and large sausage-like flower spikes up to 1 m tall with tiny flowers and fruit covering the spike.

## DISTRIBUTION

Very scattered throughout New Zealand, but commonest in high rainfall areas, e.g. South Taranaki, Westland

## HABITAT

Margins of wetlands, damp cliffs and banks, often in light shade.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

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

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Giant, clump-forming, gynodioecious, summergreen herb, with short, stout, horizontal rhizomes. Winter resting buds massive, to about 25cm long. Lvs to about 2.5 m high, rhubarb-like, but rough to the touch. Petiole to 1m long, studded with conic, short, often reddish, prickles. Inflorescence spike-like and up to 1 m long, with very small flowers. small round orange fruit 1.5-2 mm long.

## SIMILAR TAXA

Very identifiable plant. Some specimens in cultivation have been called *G. manicata*, perhaps in error but perhaps to avoid the prohibition on growing *G. tinctoria*. These always have a much more lax flowering spike. But otherwise are very similar dimensions to *G. manicata*.

## FLOWERING

October and November

## FLOWER COLOURS

Green, Red/Pink

## FRUITING

Autumn



Invading a slip face, Catlins rainforest, Southland. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 25/11/2021, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Invading a slip face, Catlins rainforest, Southland. Photographer: Jesse Bythell, Date taken: 25/11/2021, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## LIFE CYCLE

Perennial. Gynomonoecious, i.e. has female and hermaphrodite flowers on the same plant. Reproduces by seed, and massive rhizomes. Huge amounts of seed with high viability is produced. No information on seed longevity. Seed spread by birds and water, rhizomes by deliberate plantings, soil movement.

## YEAR NATURALISED

1968

## ORIGIN

Chile to Colombia in the Andes

## REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental plant

## CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Can be controlled manually, mechanically or herbicidally depending on situation.

## TOLERANCES

Extremely tolerant of salt, wide variety of soil conditions, very wet swampy sites to dry banks.

## ETYMOLOGY

**gunnera:** Named after Bishop Gunner, a Swedish botanist

## NATIONAL PEST PLANT ACCORD SPECIES

**This plant is listed in the 2020 National Pest Plant Accord.** The National Pest Plant Accord (NPPA) is an agreement to prevent the sale and/or distribution of specified pest plants where either formal or casual horticultural trade is the most significant way of spreading the plant in New Zealand. For up to date information and an electronic copy of the 2020 Pest Plant Accord manual (including plant information and images) visit the [MPI website](#).

## ATTRIBUTION

Factsheet prepared by Paul Champion and Deborah Hofstra (NIWA). Features description from Webb et al., (1988).

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Webb, C.J.; Sykes, W.R.; Garnock-Jones, P.J. (1988). Flora of New Zealand Volume 4: Naturalised pteridophytes, gymnosperms, dicotyledons. Botany Division, DSIR, Christchurch.

Popay et al (2010). An illustrated guide to common weeds of New Zealand, third edition. NZ Plant Protection Society Inc, 416pp.

Williams, PA; Ogle, CC, Timmins, SM; La Cock, G; Clarkson, J (2005). Chilean rhubarb (*Gunnera tinctoria*); biology, ecology and conservation impacts in New Zealand.

DOC Research & Development Series no.210. Dept of Conservation, Wellington.

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/gunnera-tinctoria/>