

Aciphylla ferox

COMMON NAME

fierce speargrass, taramea

FAMILY

Apiaceae

AUTHORITY

Aciphylla ferox W.R.B.Oliv.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

NVS CODE

ACIFER

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 22

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened | Qualifiers: DP

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. South Island, Nelson through Marlborough to North Canterbury.

HABITAT

Low Alpine (600–1400 m.a.s.l.), often prominent in subalpine scrub, mixed snow tussock-scrub, grassland and herbfield.



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

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A massive bright green plant growing up to 1 m tall, as single clumps or in small groups. **Leaves** subbipinnately pinnate, 2-4 pairs, up to approximately 40 cm long. Sheaths thick, coriaceous, about 70 x 30 mm, tapering to about 20 mm. **Stipules** rigid, approximately 150 x 40 mm, tapering to rigid pungent tips. **Petioles** slightly concavo-convex, striate, approximately 100-150 x 15 mm, tapering to about 10 mm; margins cartilaginous, smooth. Lowest internodes up to approximately 30 mm long. **Primary pinnae** straight or nearly so, erect, lowest approximately 150 x 10-15 mm, with base about 7 mm wide, expanding to greatest width at the middle, then tapering to pungent point; midrib usually rather obscure, margins serrulate-crenulate. **Flowering stems** very stout, grooved; male plants with inflorescence approximately 75 cm long; **bracts** verticillate, lower whorl empty, about 150 mm distant from next whorl. Sheath submembranous, ribbed, approximately 90 x 10 mm, gradually tapering to about 6 mm. **Stipules** unequal, stiff, up to approximately 70 x 2 mm, pungent; central leaflet up to approximately 200 x 4 mm. Upper bracts rigid; sheaths very coriaceous, approximately 30 x 5 mm; stipules usually absent; leaflet rigid, approximately 50 x 3 mm, midrib evident. **Umbels** numerous, on stout striate peduncles up to approximately 80-100 x 2-3 mm, bearing at intervals small umbels; main umbels on stiff rays up to approximately 30 mm long, with narrow lanceolate involucral bracts about 5 mm long. Umbellules on spreading rays up to 10 mm long, about 5 mm diameter. **Fruit** approximately 4 mm long.

SIMILAR TAXA

Aciphylla horrida the leaves have a short stout petiole dividing near the base of the leaf, in *A. ferox* the petiole is long (100-150 mm), so only the upper half of the leaf is divided.

Also see taxonomic notes below.

FLOWERING

November – January (-February)

FLOWER COLOURS

Yellow

FRUITING

January – March

LIFE CYCLE

Winged schizocarps are dispersed primarily by wind (Thorsen et al., 2009).

ETYMOLOGY

aciphylla: From the Latin *acicula* 'needle' and the Greek *phyllum* 'leaf', meaning needle-leaf.

ferox: From the Latin *ferox* 'fierce', usually referring to very spiny plants

TAXONOMIC NOTES

Dawson & LeComte suggest this species is part of the group with milky juice. They note it may also be seen to hybridise; *A. ferox* x *A. anomala* seen in north-west Nelson and reported by J. W. Dawson.

An entity known as *Aciphylla* "Lomondi" is also similar to this species, "it is found in the dryer eastern areas (Livingstone Mts, Eyre Mts, Wakatipu Basin). It can be difficult distinguishing it from *A. aurea* where the two species meet. Generally, the leaf segments are wider and often but not always glaucous (Lyttle, pers. comm. 2021)".

ATTRIBUTION

Description adapted by M. Ward from Allan (1961) and Mark (2012).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Allan, H. H. 1961. Flora of New Zealand. Vol. 1. Wellington: Government Printer. pg. 485-486.

Dawson, J.W. LeComte, J.R. 1978. Research on *Aciphylla* - a progress report. *Tuatara* 23: pg. 49-67.

Lyttle, D. 2021. Personal communication on InaturalistNZ January 17th 2021.

<https://inaturalist.nz/observations/68189913>

Mark, A. F. 2012. Above the Treeline: A Nature Guide to Alpine New Zealand. Craig Potton Publishing, Nelson. pg. 138, 140.

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 2009 Vol. 11 No. 4 pp. 285-309

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/aciphylla-ferox/>