

Alternanthera philoxeroides

COMMON NAME

alligator weed

SYNONYMS

Telanthera philoxeroides

FAMILY

Amaranthaceae

AUTHORITY

Alternanthera philoxeroides (Mart.) Griseb.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

NVS CODE

ALTPHI

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Sprawling emergent perennial herb. Leaves are bright green and waxy. They are between 5-10 cm long, up to 2 cm wide, and arranged in opposite pairs on the stem. The white flower looks like a small clover flower and is at the end of a longish stalk. Stems are thick, soft, and hollow, often with a reddish tinge.

DISTRIBUTION

Locally abundant in parts of Northland and Auckland regions. Scattered distribution in Waikato, Bay of Plenty and single sites known from Horizons, Canterbury and West Coast.

HABITAT

Warm still and slow flowing water bodies, swamps, ponds, stream banks, dune hollows, flooded pasture and cropping land and urban lawns. It will tolerate a wide habitat range including brackish water, amongst pasture and terrestrial crops.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

Usually is a hydrophyte but occasionally found in uplands (non-wetlands).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

An almost glabrous rhizomatous perennial herb, growing either as terrestrial or rooted emergent, or free flowing aquatic plant. Stems are 10-70cm long often forming large densely interwoven mats. Leaves are dark green, opposite, sessile, linear, 2 to 7 cm long, 5 to 40 mm wide. Flowers are silvery-white, 1.2 to 1.4 cm dia. borne on stalks 2 to 7 cm long rising from the leaf axis. Root is short and filamentous in water, rising mainly from nodes, longer & thicker in soil often extending below 50 cm.

SIMILAR TAXA

Two native *Alternanthera* species (*A. nahui*) and lesser joyweed (*A. denticulata*), Senegal tea (*Gymnocoronis spilanthoides*), and primrose willow (*Ludwigia peploides*). The native *Alternanthera* species are smaller, with the flowers lacking stalks and located at the base of paired leaves whereas the stalk (peduncle) on *A. philoxeroides* can be up to 9 cm long. Senegal tea has serrated and wavy leaf margins. Primrose willow has alternate leaves.



Karikari peninsula, Sept. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Alternanthera philoxeroides. Photographer: Graeme La Cock, Licence: CC BY-NC.

FLOWERING

Flowering is not known to occur in NZ. Midsummer till March in Australia (Parsons & Cuthbert, 2001)

FLOWER COLOURS

White

FRUITING

Seed set is unknown in New Zealand.

LIFE CYCLE

Reproduction is vegetative by the extension of prostrate stems or stem fragmentation. The floating fringe of marginal mats is also readily fragmented and dispersed. Machinery (e.g. for mechanical drain clearance) has been shown to spread stem fragments between catchments. Seed set is unknown in New Zealand.

In Australia, seeds are produced, but rarely viable under local conditions (Parsons & Cuthbertson, 2001).

Potentially spread by people mistaking weed for mukunu-wenna (*A. sessilis*) which is occasionally used as a vegetable.

YEAR NATURALISED

1906

ORIGIN

Native to South America.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Accidental, contamination of ballast

CONTROL TECHNIQUES

Method of control is dependent on the scale/size of the infestation and the habitat (e.g., the nature of the watercourse). Notify regional council if found (except Northland and Auckland where this plant is widespread)

TOLERANCES

Highly tolerant of poor drainage. Tolerant of drought and shade. Slightly tolerant of frost. It will also re-sprout from grazing and other physical damage.

ETYMOLOGY

alternanthera: From the Latin *alternus* 'alternate' and the Greek *anthera* 'anther', meaning alternating anther, probably in reference to the anthers being alternately fertile and barren.

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).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Champion et al (2012). Freshwater Pests of New Zealand. NIWA publication.

<http://www.niwa.co.nz/freshwater-and-estuaries/management-tools/identification-guides-and-fact-sheets/freshwater-pest-species>.

Johnson PN, Brooke PA (1989). Wetland plants in New Zealand. DSIR Field Guide, DSIR Publishing, Wellington. 319pp.

Coffey BT, Clayton JS (1988). New Zealand water plants: a guide to plants found in New Zealand freshwaters. Ruakura Agricultural Centre. 65pp.

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

Timmins, S., McKenzie, I. (1995). Weeds in New Zealand Protected Natural Areas Database. (Department of Conservation technical series, 1172-6873 ; no. 8). Department of Conservation: Wellington.

Johnson, A. T., Smith, H. A. (1972). Plant Names Simplified: Their pronunciation, derivation and meaning. Landsman Bookshop Ltd: Buckenhill, UK.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/alternanthera-philoxeroides/>