

# Atriplex australasica

## COMMON NAME

orache, saltbush

## SYNONYMS

*Atriplex patula* var. *gunnii* Aellen, *A. patula* var. *serratifolia* Aellen

## FAMILY

Amaranthaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Atriplex australasica* Moq.

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

## ENDEMIC TAXON

No

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

## NVS CODE

ATRAUS

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36-38

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: RR, SO

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: RR, SO

2009 | At Risk – Relict | Qualifiers: SO, RR

2004 | Non-resident Native – Vagrant

## DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. New Zealand: South Island (known from a 1770 collection from the Marlborough Sounds, possibly from two 1860 collections made from south Canterbury by Haast and Kirk), Chatham Islands (abundant). Also Australia (southern coast) and Tasmania.

## HABITAT

Strictly coastal. On the Chatham Islands it is usually found in open habitats such as along sand, shell, cobble or boulder beaches bordering the lagoon, on clay banks and cliff faces throughout the main island, particularly where near shag roosts, and commonly amongst sea-bird colonies and seal haul outs.



Chatham Islands. Photographer: John Sawyer, Licence: CC BY-NC.



*Atriplex australasica* young male plants, Otatau Point, Chatham (Rekohu) Island. Photographer: Peter J. de Lange, Date taken: 12/01/2006, Licence: CC BY-NC.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Annual much-branched, grey-green, glaucous to red-green, monoecious (?gynodioecious) shrub up to 1 × 2 m. **Main stems** quadrangular, widely spreading to sub-erect, woody at base, otherwise firmly fleshy to succulent; deeply ribbed, stout up to 15 mm diameter, grey-green to glaucous at first becoming purple-red to maroon with age. **Upper stems** similar, though much branched, ribbed and more or less slender. **Petioles** stout, fleshy up to 20 mm long. **Leaves** 20–100 × 30–60 mm, grey-green, glaucous to red-green, very fleshy to almost succulent, broadly lanceolate, broadly-deltoid to broadly hastate, lamina of young plants more or less entire, usually with 1–2 deep forward projected lobes near base, these often present on one side, mature leaves entire or deeply though irregularly lobed to almost coarsely dentate, lobes broadly deltoid blunt ended, forward projecting; leaf-base broadly cuneate; apex obtuse, sub-obtuse to acute. **Inflorescence leaves** similar though smaller. **Inflorescence** long, spiciform, paniculate more or less arching and pendulous at fruiting. **Flowers** in dense glomerules, these at first continuous, become disjunct; upper glomerules usually subtended by small bract-like leaves. **Male flowers** with perianths 0.5–1 mm long; segments green with fine hyaline margin. **Female flowers** enclosed by bracteoles 1.5–1.8–(2) mm long at anthesis, sessile, rhombic-triangular to triangular hastate, usually entire, sometimes toothed or with protuberances. **Fruiting bracteoles** 3–4 × 2–5 mm, deltoid, fused near base, equal to subequal, entire or with 1–2 teeth, smooth or with warty protuberances, very fleshy, grey-green to glaucous at first becoming black and much-thickened with age, apices acute. **Fruits** dimorphic, enclosed within bracteoles, mostly 2.5–4 mm diameter, orbicular, laterally flattened, radicle basal, horizontal; pericarp loose, chartaceous often ruptured at fruit maturation. **Testa** glossy black, smooth.

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Atriplex patula* L. with which it has been confused in New Zealand literature. It should be noted that many botanists regard both species as the same, in which case *A. patula* has priority. From *A. patula* s.s., *A. australasica* differs consistently by its much wider, often deeply toothed or lobed leaves. In immature or juvenile plants the leaves are often entire or lobed 1–2 times near the base. However, from the typical form of *A. patula* seen in New Zealand, *A. australasica* differs by its more robust stature and much more fleshy-glaucous foliage.

## FLOWERING

November–April

## FLOWER COLOURS

Green

## FRUITING

December–May

## LIFE CYCLE

Spongy nutlet dispersed by water and possibly also wind and granivory (Thorsen et al., 2009).

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Unknown. However probably easily grown from fresh seed and semi-hardwood cuttings.

## THREATS

Uncertain. Only recently rediscovered on the Chatham Islands where it is very common.

## ETYMOLOGY

**atriplex:** From an ancient Latin name whose derivation is uncertain, but a possible explanation is the name comes from the Greek a- 'without' and traphein 'nourishment' because many of these species grow in arid desert soils

**australasica:** Of or from Australasia

## WHERE TO BUY

Not commercially available.

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet and description prepared for the NZPCN by P.J. de Lange July 2007

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ppees.2009.06.001>.

### **NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION**

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### **MORE INFORMATION**

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/atriplex-australasica/>