

Coleus australis

COMMON NAME

cockspur Flower

SYNONYMS

Plectranthus australis R.Br., *Plectranthus parviflorus* Willd.

FAMILY

Lamiaceae

AUTHORITY

Coleus australis (R.Br.) A.J.Paton

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

No

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 34

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: DP, SO

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: SO

2009 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser | Qualifiers: SO

2004 | Non-resident Native – Coloniser

DISTRIBUTION

Indigenous. In New Zealand confined to the North Island, where it is known locally from Tangihua and Mimiwhanga in Northland, and from the Waikato near Kawhia Harbour (Pukenoī, Awaroa Valley, Pirorua Valley), and at Whenuakite, on the Coromandel Peninsula. Common in Eastern Australia, present also in the Hawaiian Islands, Rarotonga and the Australs (Raivavae, Tubuai).

HABITAT

Coastal to lowland. Mainly on base rich rocks in regenerating or early successional forest. Often found as an emergent on rock outcrops. Occasionally found on slips.



Plant with emergent inflorescence, Ex cult Matauratahi Bluff. Photographer: Gillian M. Crowcroft, Date taken: 01/02/1991, Licence: All rights reserved.



Plant with emergent inflorescence, Ex Cult Te Koraha Farm Station, below Otuaakahi. Photographer: Gillian M. Crowcroft, Date taken: 01/02/1991, Licence: All rights reserved.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Perennial herb, all parts aromatic when bruised; stems greenish-orange, glandular puberulent, erect to spreading, ascending to 1 m, usually dying down to tuberous base after flowering. Petioles to 40 mm, hairy, channelled above. Leaf lamina 30-80 x 20-70 mm, green to yellow-green, broadly ovate, membranous, puberulent (especially on veins), with orange glands on leaf undersides; base truncate to cuneate, apex acute; margins with up to 10 pairs of teeth. Inflorescence terminal, narrow, up to 200 mm long. Flowers in whorls (verticels), these 8-20-flowered. Calyx 2-lipped; lower lip with 4 triangular subequal teeth, upper lip suborbicular, mucronate; fruiting calyx with prominent raised vein net. Corolla 8-11 mm; slightly hairy and glandular outside, tube horizontal or declined, pale blue to whitish, upper lip 2.4-4 mm; lower lip 4-5.5 mm. Stamens in lower lip, anthers dark blue. Style included equal in length of longest stamen. Nutlets 0.8-1 mm, rounded, glossy dark brown.

SIMILAR TAXA

None - the distinctive tuberous root stock, uniformly green to yellow-green leaves, which when bruised give of a distinctive pungent yet subtly lemon scented smell, and pale blue to white flowers are not seen in any of the cultivated or naturalised *Coleus* / *Plectranthus* present in New Zealand. *Coleus australis* is very variable throughout its range but New Zealand plants seem to be closest to those found in Queensland.

FLOWERING

October - April

FLOWER COLOURS

Blue, White

FRUITING

October - June

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Very easy from seed and stem cuttings. However, it can become rather invasive and on account of this is unlikely to prove popular in cultivation. It is rather drought tolerant and does well on a sunny rock wall though plants look their best in partial shade with ample moisture. Some people find the peculiar scent of the plants foliage rather nauseating.

THREATS

First recognised in the country in 1989, though it had been collected earlier and confused with other quite different naturalised species. Although uncommon this species seems to be holding its own, and possibly even actively increasing its range. It does not seem to be particularly palatable, and in the wild goats, sheep and even possums tend to avoid it. Although almost certainly indigenous this species will need to be watched as it can be invasive in gardens and may yet prove a problem in the wild.

ETYMOLOGY

australis: Southern

ATTRIBUTION

Fact Sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange 1 August 2003. Description modified from Sykes & de Lange (1993)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Sykes, W.R.; de Lange, P. J. 1993: *Plectranthus parviflorus* Willd. (Lamiaceae) in New Zealand. *New Zealand Journal of Botany* 31: 11-14.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/coleus-australis/>