

# Epilobium brunnescens subsp. brunnescens

## COMMON NAME

creeping willowherb

## SYNONYMS

*Epilobium pedunculare* var. *brunnescens* Cockayne.

## FAMILY

Onagraceae

## AUTHORITY

*Epilobium brunnescens* (Cockayne) P.H.Raven et Engelhorn subsp. *brunnescens*

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

## ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

## ENDEMIC GENUS

No

## ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

## NVS CODE

EPIBRU

## CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

## CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened

## PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

## DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. New Zealand. North, South, Stewart, Chatham, Auckland, Campbell and Macquarie Islands. Naturalised in the British Isles and the Guernsey Islands.

## HABITAT

Widespread in open ground, especially along the sides gravelly river beds and on damp rock faces. Uncommon in the northern North Island, and as a rule more common in montane areas of that island. A species preferring areas of high rainfall so less common in the eastern South Island.

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

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



Kaiwharawhara Stream, Wellington.  
Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken:  
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Kaiwharawhara Stream, Wellington.  
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## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Matted, creeping herb forming patches up to 2 m across. Stems light brown, with well-marked lines of strigillose hairs running down from margins of petioles, very rarely glabrous. Flowers arising individually from the leaf axils, the stems continuing to grow and root beyond the point where flowers are produced. Leaves opposite, firmly membranous; dull green often with a red or brown-tinge, bearing 0-1(-2) obscure lateral veins either side of midrib; lamina 1.5-13.0 × 1.5-12.0 mm ovate to broadly ovate, apex rounded to obtuse, base obtuse to truncate, entire, rarely with 1-2(-4) weakly developed teeth on each margin; petiole often absent, if present then 0.5-6.0(-7.0) mm long. Flowers usually drooping at anthesis (rarely erect). Ovaries green or coppery, 6-22 mm long; subglabrous or sparsely hairy, indumentum comprised of appressed eglandular or erect glandular or eglandular hairs; borne on a glabrous pedicle, 7-55(-80) mm long; flowers falling when pedicel elongation is complete. Sepals not keeled, 1.5-3.4(-4.0) × 0.9-1.2 mm, glabrous, occasionally bearing sparse, appressed eglandular or erect glandular or eglandular hairs. Petals white, (2.3)-3.2-7.0 × 1.8-5.0 mm, notch 0.9-1.4 mm deep. Anthers yellow, 0.4-0.75 × 0.3-0.6 mm, filaments of longer anthers 0.9-2.5 mm long, those of shorter 0.5-2.1 mm. Style white, 1.2-3.2 mm long; stigma white, clavate, 1.0-1.3(-2.55) × 0.6-0.9 mm, surrounded by anthers at anthesis. Capsule glabrate or sparsely hairy, indumentum of appressed eglandular or erect glandular or eglandular hairs running along lines of dehiscence, 12-60 mm long, borne on a glabrous pedicel (16-)35-80(-120) mm long. Seeds brown, 0.75-1.2 × 0.2-0.4 mm, obovoid, minutely papillose; coma 4-7 mm long, readily detaching or persistent.

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Epilobium brunnescens* subsp. *brunnescens* is most likely to be confused with *E. nerteroides* with which it often grows, and *E. nummularifolium*. *Epilobium nerteroides* is distinguished from *E. brunnescens* by its smaller and looser (less matted) growth habit; subglabrous stems, glabrous ovaries, and flowers which fall before pedicel elongation has completed. From *Epilobium nummularifolium*, *E. brunnescens* differs by the leaf shape (ovate to broadly ovate c.f. broadly ovate to oblate) and texture (firmly membranous to almost fleshy (so scarcely wilting when picked)), c.f. membranous (wilting readily when picked)). In *Epilobium brunnescens*, the pedicel usually completes elongation before the flower drops off, whereas the flowers drop before pedicel elongation has completed in *E. nummularifolium*. The capsules of *Epilobium brunnescens* are glabrate to very sparsely hairy, whereas those of *E. nummularifolium* are copiously invested in grey-strigillose hairs. Finally *Epilobium brunnescens* subsp. *minutiflorum* though treated as a subspecies of *E. brunnescens* merits species rank. The two subspecies are often sympatric / syntopic, and are morphologically distinct from each other.

## FLOWERING

October - April

## FLOWER COLOURS

White

## FRUITING

December - May

## PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easily grown from seed and rooted pieces. Inclined to become weedy.

## ETYMOLOGY

**epilobium**: From the Greek epi- 'upon' and lobos 'a pod', the flowers appearing to be growing on the seed pod.

**brunnescens**: Pale brown

## ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (30 December 2019). Description adapted from Raven & Raven (1976).

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Raven, P.H.; Raven, T.E. 1976: The genus *Epilobium* in Australasia. New Zealand DSIR Bulletin 216. Wellington, Government Printer.

## NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Epilobium brunnescens* subsp. *brunnescens* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network.

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/epilobium-brunnescens-subsp-brunnescens/> (Date website was queried)

**MORE INFORMATION**

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/epilobium-brunnescens-subsp-brunnescens/>