

Epilobium hirsutum

COMMON NAME

great willowherb

FAMILY

Onagraceae

AUTHORITY

Epilobium hirsutum L.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Herbs - Dicotyledons other than Composites

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 36

CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Stout, rhizomatous herb with erect stems up to 2 m tall. All parts (except flowers) conspicuously hairy. Leaves lanceolate to narrowly oblong, coarsely toothed light green, green to grey-green. Flowers conspicuous, up to 10 mm diameter, petals dark pink to rose-purple, stigma white, exserted.

DISTRIBUTION

Naturalised to New Zealand. As of 2019 known only from the South Island from wetlands in North Canterbury

HABITAT

Wetlands margins and damp ground in wasteland and urban areas.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACW: Facultative Wetland

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

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Semi-aquatic, softly-hairy, rhizomatous, much branched herb up to 2 m tall. **Stems** erect, woody near base, densely, softly pubescent; hairs in admixtures of non-glandular and eglandular. **Leaves** opposite to subopposite, 30–60 × 10–26 mm, light green, green to grey-green, surfaces densely, finely pubescent (hairs eglandular), lanceolate to narrowly oblong, bases clasping stem and slightly decurrent with stem, apices acute, margins coarsely to finely toothed in upper $\frac{1}{3}$. **Inflorescences** borne in upper $\frac{1}{3}$ of stem, with one flower per leaf axil. **Flowers** erect up to 10 mm diameter; ovaries erect or outwardly falcate, 30–50 mm long, densely strigulose, dull green-green or maroon, borne on a pedicel 4–20 mm long. **Hypanthium** 1.8–2.8 × 1.6–3.2 mm, bearing a conspicuous rim of white hairs near apex. **Sepals** 5–7.0 × 2.3–2.8 mm, grey-green to green, broadly lanceolate to obtuse, keeled, both surfaces softly pubescent. **Petals** 6–18.0 × 5.0–10.0 mm, dark pink to rose-purple, ovate, apically weakly to prominently notched. **Styles** white, exserted. **Fruits** 25–100 mm long, pubescent, hairs glandular. **Seeds** c. 1mm long, surface coarsely papillose, comose.

SIMILAR TAXA

Epilobium pallidiflorum is superficially similar but is a smaller, sparingly branched plant up 1.4 m tall (usually less), with narrower lanceolate leaves, and whose stems and leaves are finely, sparsely hairy (not densely so). The inflorescences of *Epilobium pallidiflorum* when in bud nodding rather than erect, while the flower petals are also mostly white, occasionally pale pink.

FLOWERING

November–April



FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, Violet/Purple

FRUITING

January–May

LIFE CYCLE

Perennial herb with wind dispersed seeds

YEAR NATURALISED

2018

ORIGIN

Possibly Australia (where this species is also naturalised) or from Europe or North America.

REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Possibly illegally cultivated from which plants escaped, or possibly naturally dispersed from Australia (where it not indigenous).

ETYMOLOGY

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

NOTE

Epilobium hirsutum is a serious threat to New Zealand wetlands and waterways. If you think you have spotted great willowherb plants, do not attempt to remove them. Take a photo, record the location, and call Biosecurity New Zealand's exotic pest and disease hotline on 0800 80 99 66.

ATTRIBUTION

Description and fact sheet prepared by P.J. de Lange (10 June 2020). Description based on herbarium specimens. Some content adapted from [Landcare Research eFlora](#), [CC BY 3.0 NZ](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Biosecurity New Zealand. 2020. Great willowherb fact sheet. 1 p.
<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/45019/direct>

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

Please cite as: de Lange, P.J. (Year at time of access): *Epilobium hirsutum* Fact Sheet (content continuously updated). New Zealand Plant Conservation Network. <https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/epilobium-hirsutum/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

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