

Imperata cheesemanii

COMMON NAME

imperata, Cheeseman's imperata

SYNONYMS

None

FAMILY

Poaceae

AUTHORITY

Imperata cheesemanii Hack.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Grasses

NVS CODE

IMPCHE

CHROMOSOME NUMBER

2n = 20

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: IE

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

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

2009 | At Risk – Naturally Uncommon | Qualifiers: OL, IE

2004 | Range Restricted

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic to Raoul Island, Kermadec Islands group.

HABITAT

Widespread in open ground, coastal and mid-elevation forest.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Widely spreading, rhizomatous, perennial forming dense, large mats or scattered clumps, to 800 mm; rhizomes 2–3 mm diameter, internodes covered by bracts; branching extravaginal. **Leaf-sheath** light cream to brown, glabrous. **Ligule** 1 mm, truncate, ciliolate. **Leaf-blade** 120–500 × 5–15 mm, glaucous-green to dark green, linear from pseudopetiolate base, glabrous apart from hairs on margins near ligule; margins sparsely scabrid above, tip acute, pungent. **Culm** 500–800 mm, nodes and internodes glabrous. **Panicle** 100–200 × 20–40 mm, narrow-lanceolate, gradually narrowed upwards to an acute point, initially dark purple to red-purple maturing greyish white with soft, dull hairs, c.6 mm, concealing spikelets; branches erect or the lower ± spreading, simple or branched again near base. Spikelets c. 3 mm, enveloped by hairs to 6 mm. **Glumes** = spikelet, purplish, with some scattered long hairs; lower 5-nerved, upper 3-nerved. **Lemmas and palea** < glumes, hyaline, nerveless, denticulate. **Stamen** 1; anther c. 2 mm. **Stigmas** purple. **Seeds** not described.



In cultivation ex Raoul Island. Aug 2007.
Photographer: Peter J. de Lange, Licence: CC BY-NC.

MANAAKI WHENUA ONLINE INTERACTIVE KEY

Key to the grasses of New Zealand

SIMILAR TAXA

No other grass species known from the Kermadec Islands group could be confused with this species. From the introduced *I. cylindrica* var. *major* (Hees) C.E.Hubb. (known only from northern North Island) it differs by the narrow-lanceolate rather than densely spiciform panicle, with the lower branches \pm spreading rather than appressed; by the 1 rather than 2 stamens, and by the culm nodes \pm glabrous rather than pubescent.

FLOWERING

October–April

FLOWER COLOURS

Violet/Purple

FRUITING

December–July

LIFE CYCLE

Hairy florets are wind dispersed (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Easy from fresh seed and rooted pieces. Inclined to be very aggressive and weedy, and has proved quite tolerant of mild frosts, from which it simply dies back, re-sprouting later.

THREATS

Abundant and not threatened on Raoul Island.

ETYMOLOGY

cheesemanii: Named after Thomas Frederick Cheeseman (1846 - 15 October 1923) who was a New Zealand botanist and naturalist who, in 1906, produced *The Manual of the New Zealand Flora*.

WHERE TO BUY

Occasionally offered by specialist native plant nurseries.

ATTRIBUTION

Description modified from Edgar and Connor (2000).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Edgar E, Connor HE. 2000. *Flora of New Zealand*. Vol. V. Grasses. Christchurch, Manaaki Whenua Press. 650 p.
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.

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/imperata-cheesemanii/>