

Lepidosperma australe

COMMON NAME

square sedge, square-stemmed sedge

SYNONYMS

Vauthiera australis A.Rich.; Cladium vauthiera C.B.Clarke ex Cheeseman;
Cladium australe (A.Rich.) Druce; Machaerina australis (A.Rich.) Koyama

FAMILY

Cyperaceae

AUTHORITY

Lepidosperma australe (A.Rich.) Hook.f.

FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Native

ENDEMIC TAXON

Yes

ENDEMIC GENUS

No

ENDEMIC FAMILY

No

STRUCTURAL CLASS

Sedges

NVS CODE

LEPAUS

CURRENT CONSERVATION STATUS

2017 | Not Threatened

PREVIOUS CONSERVATION STATUSES

2012 | Not Threatened

2009 | Not Threatened

2004 | Not Threatened

DISTRIBUTION

Endemic. North Island, South Island, Stewart Island/Rakiura and Chatham Islands.

HABITAT

Coastal to alpine (up to 1300 m a.s.l.), usually in open ground, seral vegetation or peat bogs. Colonising seasonally dry, or well drained substrates as well as permanently wet substrates such as peat.

WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FAC: Facultative

Commonly occurs as either a hydrophyte or non-hydrophyte (non-wetlands).



Coromandel, March. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.



Coromandel, March. Photographer: John Smith-Dodsworth, Licence: CC BY-NC.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Stout, rush-like sedge forming dense blue-green to dark green patches up to 2 m tall. **Rhizomes** short, lignaceous, 2–3 mm diameter, bearing distant apiculate, dark brown scales. **Culms** quadrangular, glabrous, densely packed, rigidly erect, coriaceous, 0.2–2.0 m tall, 1.0–2.5 mm diameter, dark blue or grey-green (glaucous). **Leaves** all reduced to brown, sheathing, membranous, mucronate bracts, or the upper 1–2 with laminae quadrangular, or occasionally trigonous 50–350 mm long with subulate, pungent, dark brown apices. **Inflorescence** a 10–40 × 5–15 mm, dense, contracted, spicate head; subtending bract usually < inflorescence with a rigid, subulate awn up to 15 mm long. **Spikelets** 1-flowered, 4–5 mm long, on short, stout, stiff stalks. **Glumes** 4–6, the lowest broadly ovate, mucronate, the upper ones ovate-lanceolate, acuminate, coriaceous, papillose with scabrid midrib and margins, midrib distinctly thickened; only the uppermost glume fertile, the rest empty. *Hypogynous scales* 6, 0.5 mm long, white, triangular when mature, fused at the base to form a 6-lobed persistent cup. **Anthers** with an elongated red connective. **Nut** 4 mm long, lustrous light brown, more or less trigonous, oblong-ellipsoid, smooth, narrowed above to the persistent, scabrid style-base.

SIMILAR TAXA

None. This species is easily distinguished by the culms which are usually dark blue-green and square in cross-section—hence the common names square sedge and square-stemmed sedge.

FLOWERING

August–December

FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink

FRUITING

October–July (often present year round)

LIFE CYCLE

Scaly nuts are dispersed by water, wind and possibly ants (Thorsen et al., 2009).

PROPAGATION TECHNIQUE

Can be difficult to cultivate. The seed is difficult to germinate, and plants resent root disturbance and usually die if transplanted. However, considerable success has been achieved growing plants and/or germinating seed in untreated saw dust. Despite these problems this is an attractive species well worth attempting to grow. Once established it flourishes in a range of conditions from full sun in free draining soil to shade and permanently damp soils.

ETYMOLOGY

lepidosperma: Scale seed

australe: Southern, from the Latin australis

WHERE TO BUY

Plants are occasionally available from specialist nurseries.

ATTRIBUTION

Fact sheet prepared for NZPCN by P.J. de Lange (8 September 2006). Description adapted from Moore & Edgar (1970).

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Moore LB, Edgar E. 1970. Flora of New Zealand, Volume II. Indigenous Tracheophyta: Monocotyledones except Gramineae. Government Printer, Wellington, NZ. 354 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.

NZPCN FACT SHEET CITATION

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<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lepidosperma-australe/> (Date website was queried)

MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/lepidosperma-australe/>