

# Erica lusitanica

## COMMON NAME

Spanish heath

## FAMILY

Ericaceae

## AUTHORITY

*Erica lusitanica* Rudolphi

## FLORA CATEGORY

Vascular – Exotic

## STRUCTURAL CLASS

Trees & Shrubs - Dicotyledons

## NVS CODE

ERILUS

## CONSERVATION STATUS

Not applicable

## HABITAT

Terrestrial. A plant of coastal, lowland and montane habitats (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Plant grows in sites with low - moderate fertility (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). The plant occurs in areas with moderate to high rainfall and also where the soil is acidic (Wilson & Galloway 1993). The plant is found in scrub and forest margin, shrubland, tussockland, herbfield and fernland (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). The plant occurs in rough pasture, shrubland and scrub (Wilson & Galloway 1993).

## WETLAND PLANT INDICATOR STATUS RATING

FACU: Facultative Upland

Occasionally is a hydrophyte but usually occurs in uplands (non-wetlands).

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Erect shrub to about 2m high, occasionally with a trunk > 15cm diam. Shoots densely covered with short hairs, especially when young; hairs simple, of varying lengths. Leaves in whorls of 3~4, subsessile, 3~7mm long; margins revolute and contiguous, entirely concealing undersurface; apparent or false margin sometimes with sparse hairs giving a serrulate appearance, otherwise glabrous. Flowers in lateral racemes; racemes usually densely arranged so appearing as a large terminal panicle. Pedicels about 2mm long, recurved. Bracteoles situated near base, < 1mm long, generally linear, whitish, not reaching calyx. Calyx 1~1.5mm long; lobes triangular-ovate, glabrous, white, 2~3x length of tube. Corolla 3~5mm long, tubular-campanulate, white except for rose or pink flush outside in bud, glabrous; lobes very short, very broadly ovate, erect to spreading. Stamens included; anthers approx. 1mm long, dark maroon; awns whitish, echinate, 1/2 ~ 2/3 length of anther. Style slightly exerted; stigma obconic. Capsule about 3mm long, broad ellipsoid, glabrous. (- Webb et. al., 1988)



Upper Hutt. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 03/08/2008, Licence: CC BY.



Stem hairs. Boulder Hill, western Hutt hills. Photographer: Jeremy R. Rolfe, Date taken: 28/07/2013, Licence: CC BY.

## SIMILAR TAXA

*Erica lusitanica* is most likely to be confused with *E. arborea*. *E. lusitanica* is an erect pale green shrub that grows up to 2m tall (Wilson & Galloway 1993); *E. arborea* is a shrub or small tree up to 5m tall. The young shoots of *E. lusitanica* are densely clad in simple hairs; those of *E. arborea* are echinate. The leaves of both species are narrow and less than 1cm long and are in close whorls of 3-4 (Wilson & Galloway 1993, Webb et al. 1988). The flowers are narrowly tubular (3-5mm long), pointing downwards from a tiny stalk. On *E. lusitanica* they are white, flushed with pink when in bud (Wilson & Galloway 1993); on *E. arborea* they are white (Webb et al. 1988). Stigmas of *E. lusitanica* flowers are pink to crimson, whereas they are white to pale green in the flowers of *E. arborea* (Webb et al. 1988). The seed capsule is approximately 3mm long, brown, with numerous minute seeds (Wilson & Galloway 1993).

## FLOWERING

March, April, May June, July, August, September, October, November, December

## FLOWER COLOURS

Red/Pink, White

## FRUITING

Germinable seed present in capsules in early spring (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995).

## LIFE CYCLE

Perennial. Seed requires vernalization and germination is greatest in the dark at low temperatures and greatest in fluctuating temperature when exposed to light (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). The plant has a life span of 40-50 years maximum (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seed, no vegetative reproduction (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seed is produced at the rate of 60 - 100/capsule, millions of capsules per bush (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seed viability declines slowly with time, ensuring vast seed banks (480 000 seed/m squared) (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seed remains viable in soil for at least two years (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995); viable seeds after 4 years, longevity may be longer (Buxton, 1990). Seed is dispersed by gravity, wind, water, humans and vertebrates (wool, feet) (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995).

## YEAR NATURALISED

1926

## ORIGIN

SW Europe

## REASON FOR INTRODUCTION

Ornamental.

## TOLERANCES

The plant is slightly intolerant to drought, shade and frost and tolerant to poor drainage (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Physical damage results in resprouting from the damaged base, but it does not layer (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seedlings are killed when grazed, but once taller than 5cm side shoots mean the plant is resistant to browsing (Timmins & MacKenzie 1995). Seedlings are shade tolerant (Buxton, 1990). Fire creates conditions suitable for germination and seedling establishment (Buxton, 1990). Requires low to medium soil fertility (Atkinson 1997).

## ETYMOLOGY

**erica**: From the Greek ereika 'heath' or 'heather'

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

Webb C.J., Sykes W.R., Garnock-Jones P.J. 1988. Flora of New Zealand Volume IV. Botany Division, D.S.I.R., Christchurch. 1365 p.

Wilson H.D., Galloway T. 1993. Small-leaved Shrubs of New Zealand. Manuka Press, Christchurch. 305 p.

## MORE INFORMATION

<https://www.nzpcn.org.nz/flora/species/erica-lusitanica/>