



# GREAT WILLOWHERB

The rapidly spreading weed great willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*) has been found at several locations in Canterbury. Biosecurity New Zealand is leading the effort to eradicate this pest from New Zealand. Great willowherb is an aggressive invader of wetlands and rivers and if left alone, has the potential to spread and damage these environments.

Great willowherb is an invasive flowering weed that is also known as hairy willowherb or giant willowherb. It is closely related to, and often mistaken for, the introduced slender willowherb (*Epilobium ciliatum*), and the critically threatened native herb hairy willowherb (*Epilobium hirtigerum*).

## Identifying great willowherb

- Grows to at least 2 metres and can form dense stands of plants.
- Stems stick straight up and are branched.
- The obvious pink flowers are 2–3 cm in diameter, with a white centre. Petals have a notch on the edge.
- The willow-tree shaped leaves are usually slightly hairy, in pairs (opposite one another), tooth-edged, and attach directly to the stems.
- Long, narrow seed pods split open to release many small seeds with long white hairs.

**Remember: 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.**

## Additional information

Great willowherb prefers wet or damp environments and will grow in full or partial sunlight. Sites in Canterbury have usually been wetlands and lakesides, however, any damp environment is a potential habitat, including riverbeds and roadside ditches.

Great willowherb is particularly visible when it's flowering – usually from December through to April.

Growth is aggressive. In places it has rapidly formed dense stands, crowding out native plantings. From there it can invade neighbouring undisturbed areas of vegetation.

Great willowherb spreads mainly by seed which can be dispersed by the wind, or as a contaminant such as on machinery, in gravel, or on clothing and footwear. Additionally it can be spread by the thick rhizomes (underground roots/stems), which can break up and regenerate if the plant is disturbed or damaged.



Great willowherb flower detail (Photo: Christina Stet)



Great willow herb stand (not in flower)