

Bell heather

Erica cinerea

Family Ericaceae



Identification

- **Low growing** (up to 30 cm), bushy shrub
- Small **needle-like leaves** arranged in whorls (groups) of three
- **Bell-shaped, mostly purple** (sometimes pink or white) **flowers** (6 mm long) growing near the end of the stems from December to February



Bell heather growing wild photo: T. Broughton



Bell heather photo: T. Broughton

Where is it a problem?

Bell heather grows on bare rocky sites and in high country tussock grasslands. In the South Island, it is only known to be growing in the wild in the Hunter Hills, South Canterbury.

Why is it a problem?

Bell heather can form a dense cover, suppressing other vegetation (including flax and snow tussock) and displaces desirable species. It is very hardy and spreads both vegetatively and by seed. Seed can remain viable for up to 5 years in the soil.

Status

Bell heather is listed as an unwanted organism which means that it is illegal to sell, propagate or distribute this species in New Zealand. It is also listed as a biodiversity threat species in the Canterbury Regional Pest Management Strategy. If you do find bell heather growing in the wild, please report it by either calling the Potential Pest Line (03) 363 9380 or email weeds@ecan.govt.nz

Similar species

Spanish heath (*Erica lusitanica*) grows to 2 m high and has leaves in whorls of 3–4. The flowers are white with a pink/rose flush to the buds. They are also smaller (3–5 mm long) and more tubular than the bell heather flowers.

Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) grows to 50 cm tall with small, dark green, stalkless leaves that overlap along wiry stems. Heather also produces small, bell-shaped, pink/purple flowers at the ends of the stems from December to March.



Photos from left to right: Bell heather (photo: T. Broughton), Heather (photo: P. Blaxter), Spanish heath (photo: C. Howell)