



'Alyeska' Polargrass

Arctagrostis latifolia

Uses: Revegetation Interior, Western, and Arctic Alaska

Background Information for 'Alyeska' Polargrass

In the wild, polargrass occurs in wet meadows, tundra, and marshes.

It is a pioneer species in disturbed areas. These disturbed areas are usually moist and sometimes acidic (Walkup, 1991).

Polargrass is high in food value. Grizzly bears and caribou selectively eat it (Walkup, 1991). According to naturalist Adolph Murie, bears at Denali National Park find polargrass to be a favorite food during June and July (Klebesadel, 1969).

Arctagrostis latifolia grows naturally as a north-latitude species with a circumpolar distribution.



Map from Hultén, 1968.
Used with the permission of Stanford University Press.

'Alyeska' and 'Kenai' Polargrass are the same species. Parent grasses, though, were collected in different Alaskan regions.

*'Alyeska' is for revegetation in north and west Alaska.
'Kenai' is more southern.
For best results plant in the appropriate region.*

Growth

Polargrass is a perennial. It grows about 1.5 feet tall and has purple spikelets when mature.

It has wide, lax leaves and stout rhizomes (Mitchell, 1980).

It reproduces by seed and underground rhizomes.

Polargrass has small seeds and poor seedling development. Once established, it is very winter hardy.

Cultivar: 'Alyeska'

Plant Introduction Number: 562650

'Alyeska' Polargrass is a cultivar developed by the University of Alaska Agricultural Experiment Station.

The prime reason for developing this cultivar was for revegetation in Interior and Western Alaska.

The original collections (parents) for this cultivar came from native plants growing in interior and western Alaska (Mitchell, 1980).

Before being registered in 1980, 'Alyeska' was evaluated for 9 years in many different settings.

'Alyeska' is adapted to moderately wet areas, can tolerate acid soils, and may be immune to snow mold (Mitchell, 1987).

'Alyeska' Polargrass is recognized in breeder, foundation, registered, and certified seed classes.

Breeder and foundation seed is maintained by the Alaska Plant Materials Center.

Registered and certified seed is available through the Alaska Seed Growers, Inc.

Interesting Note:

The genus *Arctagrostis* comes from the Greek "Arctos" which means north or bear; and "agrostis" for fodder grass (Klebesadel, 1969).

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'Alyeska' Polargrass

'Alyeska' for Alaska Revegetation Purposes

'Alyeska' Polargrass is for moist or moderately wet areas. It is quite tolerant of low temperatures and acidic soils. It does well if planning to revegetate with a native grass where extreme conditions occur (Mitchell, 1980).

'Alyeska' does not grow well with fertilization or competition. Once established, it is very hardy and helps prevent erosion (Klebesadel, 1969). For revegetation in Western, Arctic, or Interior Alaska, 'Alyeska' should be a part of the mix—not the dominant portion.



'Alyeska' Polargrass seed
1,800,000 seeds per pound

'Alyeska' polargrass at the
Plant Materials Center in Palmer,



To Produce 'Alyeska' Polargrass

To maintain genetic purity, 'Alyeska' needs at least a 1,000 foot boundary from other polargrass varieties.

Plant 'Alyeska' after breakup in Western, Arctic, and Interior Alaska.

Using traditional plant drills, the seeding depth should be shallow. The seed is small and germination is sporadic. Plan on spreading more seed per acre to acquire a productive field (Walkup, 1991).

Once established, 'Alyeska' excels in seedling earliness and vigor of spring growth (Klebesadel, 1969).

Seed is mature mid-September. Cleaning 'Alyeska' seed is relatively easy since there is one seed per spikelet.

'Alyeska' plant characteristics

Wetness Tolerance	good
Acidity Tolerance	good
Seedling Vigor	moderate
Yield Potential	high
Longevity	long
Seed Production	moderate
Drought Resistance	poor
Winter Hardiness	good
Palatability	good

References

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Walkup, C. 1991. *Arctagrostis latifolia*. In: *Fire Effects Information System*, [Online]. USDA, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory. [Http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis](http://www.fs.fed.us/database/feis).

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