



'Kenai' Polargrass

Arctagrostis latifolia

Uses: Revegetation and Forage
Central Interior and Southern Alaska

Background Information

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 has high forage 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 during the 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 from north and west Alaska.

*'Kenai' is from the south.
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, 1987).

It spreads by short, thick rhizomes forming dense clumps.

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

Cultivar: 'Kenai'

Plant Introduction Number: 518659

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

The prime reason for this cultivar was for forage and revegetation. It will grow on moist, acidic areas in central Interior and southern Alaska.

The original collections (parents) for this cultivar came from native plants growing in Kenai and along the Sterling Highway, Alaska (Mitchell, 1987).

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

'Kenai' 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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Alaska Plant Materials Center

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'Kenai' Polargrass

'Kenai' for Alaska Revegetation Purposes

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

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



Arctagrostis latifolia seed
~1,800,000 seeds per pound

To produce 'Kenai' Polargrass

Plant 'Kenai' after breakup in central Interior to southern Alaska.

Using traditional plant drills, the seeding depth should be shallow. The seed is small with sporadic germination.

Plan to spread more seed per acre to acquire a productive field (Walkup, 1991).

'Kenai' Polargrass production at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer, Alaska.



Once established, 'Kenai' stands out from other grasses in seedling vigor and earliness of spring growth (Klebesadel, 1969).

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



'Kenai' plant characteristics

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

References

Hultén, E. 1968. *Flora of Alaska and Neighboring Territories*. © by the Board of Trustees of the Leland Stanford Jr. University, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

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Mitchell, W. 1987. "Notice of Release of 'Kenai' Polargrass." *Agroborealis* Vol. 19, No. 1, p.5.

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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