‘Alyeska’ Polargrass
*Arctagrostis latifolia*

**Uses:** Revegetation

**Interior, Western, and Arctic Alaska**

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**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).

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

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**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).

Polargrass reproduces by seed and underground rhizomes. Polargrass has small seeds and poor seedling development. Once established, it is very winter hardy.

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**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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**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).

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‘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.

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‘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.

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Alaska Plant Materials Center

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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).


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

References


