Paxson Germplasm alpine sweetvetch
Hedysarum alpinum
Selected Class Release “Natural”

Uses: Revegetation
Southcentral, Interior, Western, Subarctic Alaska

Background Information

Hedysarum alpinum is in the pea family. It grows wild in Alaska in many types of areas. Some of the places it can be found include sandy river shores, dry slopes, meadows, and roadways at high and low elevations (Williams, 1990). Hultén (1968) includes a few more habitats where it grows—spruce forests, rocky slopes, and gravel bars.

Its purple/blue flowers bloom in June and July with the seedpods ripening unevenly in July and August. As a perennial legume, it has deep tap roots.

For many Native Alaskan Peoples these roots are an important source of food. Anore Jones (1983) describes in detail how the Inupiat harvested, stored, and ate the “Masru”. Another common name for Hedysarum alpinum is “Eskimo Potato”. This also refers to its food use for arctic peoples.

The roots are also eaten by mice and bears (Jones, 1983). One way to find the roots is to search mice food caches.

Distribution

According to Hultén (1968), Hedysarum alpinum can be found throughout most of Alaska, in Siberia, and in boreal Canada.
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**Paxson Germplasm alpine sweetvetch for Alaska Revegetation Purposes**

Paxson grows easily and quickly in most situations, although slower than most grasses used for revegetation purposes. When the grass seed mix is spread evenly and Paxson is at least 5% by weight of the seed mix, this sweetvetch should perform vigorously and eventually contribute to the revegetation results.

Its long inflorescence of purple flowers adds to the visual appeal of roadside revegetation projects. A pea-like nitrogen fixer, it enriches the soil, contributing to a lower maintenance, longer lived, quality revegetation effort.

**To Produce Paxson**

Conventional farm equipment is needed. A drill for seeding to a depth of ~1/4 inch is recommended.

Seeds germinate best with a light scarification. Seed may be sown in either fall or spring. A fall seeding replicates natural conditions in Alaska and tends to encourage faster germination.

Cultural practices of light irrigation, cultivation of weeds, and a low nitrogen/high phosphorous fertilization should enhance growth (Smith and Smith, 1997).

When seed pods start cracking, harvest pods by hand or with special settings on a combine. Let pods dry, then clean seeds with a debearder and screens (Smith and Smith, 1997).

**References**


