

'Nortran' Tufted Hairgrass

Deschampsia caespitosa

Uses: Revegetation, Ground Cover, Forage
Throughout Alaska



Background Information

Sometimes called “salt and pepper” grass, the most common name for *Deschampsia caespitosa* is tufted hairgrass. It is a perennial bunchgrass with an open flowering/seed spike. As the seed matures it turns purple, making the grass look light and dark.

Its leaves are mostly basal, causing the tufted appearance. The branches on the flowering head are open and hairlike; thus its common name—tufted hairgrass.

It has a good to excellent forage value for livestock and is fair for wildlife (Stubbendieck, 1986).



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

Distribution

Deschampsia caespitosa (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) is found throughout Alaska (Hultén, 1968).

Growth

Deschampsia caespitosa is a cool season bunch grass. It will grow in most any soil. In the wild it is found in moist or boggy areas.

When compared with other hairgrasses, *D. caespitosa* has shorter, narrower leaves that are a dark green. Its inflorescence tops out about the same height as others, making an easier harvest (Mitchell, 1986).

A truly Arctic species, this hairgrass is well suited for many of Alaska's harshest environments.

Cultivar: 'Nortran'

Plant Introduction Number: 518658

'Nortran' is a cultivar developed by the Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station of the University of Alaska—Fairbanks. Based on native plant collections made in Alaska and Iceland, it was released in 1986.

This cultivar can tolerate acidic soils, cold and wet conditions, and low fertility locations.

'Nortran' has the ability to reseed itself on disturbed lands, is persistent under continual cutting or foraging, and seems resistant to many rusts and snow molds (Mitchell, 1986).

'Nortran' has a long life span of about 20 years.

'Nortran' Hairgrass 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

Deschampsia caespitosa is a host plant for many butterfly larvae.

Some of these are: Yukon Alpine, Melissa Arctic, and Kodiak Ringlet.

(<http://home.wi.rr.com/monarchraising/>, 2002).



'Nortran' Tufted Hairgrass

'Nortran' for Alaska Revegetation Purposes

Deschampsia caespitosa grows throughout the State of Alaska. Thus, for revegetation, it makes sense to use a species that naturally occurs.

'Nortran' is specified for many reclamation activities, as a portion of seed mixes for almost all soil types and moisture regimes (DOT, 2001).

'Nortran' is resistant to toxic wastes, and is therefore often used in the reclamation of mining sites. It is also recommended for the reclamation of subalpine, alpine, and mountain meadow habitats. It is not recommended for revegetation of streambank areas, since the tufted fibrous roots provide limited bank stabilization (Mitchell, 1986).



Deschampsia caespitosa seed
~1,500,000 seeds per pound



To produce 'Nortran'

'Nortran' can produce 150 to 200 pounds of seed per acre (Mitchell, 1986).

Since 'Nortran' has a life expectancy of ~20 years, it is important to plant rows far enough apart for cultivation to occur easily.

Seeds should be buried but spreading and packing is usually enough for germination. Harvest occurs in August. Seed growers can use typical equipment for this cultivar. 'Nortran' can easily become contaminated with *Poa* species.

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'Nortran' production field at the Plant Materials Center in Palmer, Alaska

'Nortran' plant characteristics

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

References

- Department of Transportation, 2001. *Alaska Highway Drainage Manual*. State of Alaska, Section 16.
- Hultén, E. 1968. *Flora of Alaska and Neighboring Territories*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.
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- Mitchell, W. 1986. *Notice of Release of 'Nortran' Tufted Hairgrass*. Agroborealis, July, 1986.
- Stubbendieck, J. 1986. *North American Range Plants*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE.