



Orchardgrass

ORCHARDGRASS(*Dactylis glomerata*) is a long-lived perennial, cool-season bunchgrass that is native to western and central Europe. The plant reproduces by seeding and forms irregular sod of tufted shoots. Leaves are long and flat with a rough texture somewhat like sandpaper. **Orchardgrass** has a distinctive seed head and because of its appearance, has gained the nickname "cocksfoot". It has been cultivated in the United States since colonial days, first being introduced into Virginia about 1760. It is now distributed over a wide part of the United States and is gaining in popularity as stronger cultivars are being introduced that are rust and disease resistant.



FACTS ABOUT ORCHARDGRASS:

- **Orchardgrass persists and grows well on soils that have moderately poor drainage; it however, will not tolerate flooding or wet soils for extended periods.**
- **It is used for pasture, hay and silage, and when planted in combination with legumes (alfalfa, etc.) it produces quality forage.**
- **Orchardgrass is adapted to shady areas or areas of reduced light.**
- **Growth begins early in the spring and regrowth will occur even after heavy grazing or mowing.**
- **It is winter hardy but is highly dependent on moisture for a sustained yield.**
- **Orchardgrass flourishes on rich soils but also grows well on poor soils.**

VARIETIES:

Paiute was developed as a forage crop for arid rangeland which receive as little as 11 inches of annual precipitation. It greens up earlier in the spring and remains green longer into the fall. It is adapted to well-drained basic and acidic soils of the Intermountain Zone.

Hallmark is a early to mid-term maturing variety that is noted for high yield, leafiness, persistency and disease resistance. Area of adaptation is the Central, Mid-Atlantic and Southern states.

Latar is unique among **Orchardgrass** varieties because of its feeding value. Laboratory tests show it to be lowest in fiber and highest in digestibility of all **Orchardgrass**. Latar is cold tolerant and will survive extremes of cold but only if dormant or protected by a snow cover. Close grazing in the fall will likely result in winter kill.

Able is a late maturing variety that is exceptionally winter hardy. It is highly disease resistant and consistently produces high yields. Adaptation is to the mid-Atlantic, Central and Southern United States.

Pomar is a dwarf **Orchardgrass** that is late-maturing, rapid developing perennial with good regrowth ability. Stems are abundant and seed production is good. It is used for erosion control, forage, low-maintenance turf areas, wildlife plantings and as seed crop. Pomar is adapted to the Intermountain zones and the Western United States.

Potomac is an early maturing variety that is often seeded with clovers. It is productive and persistent, with good rust resistance. Potomac is adapted to the Mid-Atlantic and Mid-South regions.

Sterling matures fairly early, is winter hardy and is noted for its high forage yield. Its range of adaptation is the central United States where it is primarily used for pastures.

ESTABLISHMENT / MANAGEMENT

Orchardgrass grows best in a firm, moist seed bed that is somewhat loose on the surface. As with all grasses, good seed to soil contact is essential. Depending on geographic location, **Orchardgrass** may be planted in fall or spring (fall plantings for the more southerly or lower elevation sites). Recommended seeding rate is 8 to 10 pounds of PLS/s. ft seeding with legumes, decrease rate by one half. The seed depth is 1/4 to 1/2 inch with a caltipacker often used after planting. Some more northern locations plant at 3/4" deep.

Growth characteristics make **Orchardgrass** well suited to early spring pastures. The pasture should then be used on a rotational basis, as animals tend to graze the plants too close, resulting in weakening or destruction of the stand. Close cutting at ground level will produce similar results.

Orchardgrass should not be grazed until it is eight inches tall and then no closer than 3 inches, to avoid winterkill.

Legumes planted with **Orchardgrass** do well. The legumes supply additional nitrogen for the **Orchardgrass** and when managed properly, both species remain productive for many years. If growing **Orchardgrass** in pure stands, additional nitrogen is essential. If growing **Orchardgrass** for seed, remove the stubble after harvest to insure a good seed crop the following season.

