

### Management (continued)

Tall oatgrass will not persist under continuous grazing. This plant responds well to rotation-deferred grazing systems. Periodically the grass should be allowed to mature and produce seed for continuation of the stand. Hay harvest will have the best combination of yield and quality when harvested at the boot stage. Because of its pronounced cool-season growth habit, only one hay harvest may be expected.

Tall oatgrass responds favorably to good fertility management. For optimum results apply fertilizers about two weeks after spring growth has begun and again in the fall about two weeks after resumption of active growth. Apply fertilizer based on soil tests.

### Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

‘Ruffner’ is a cultivar released by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service Appalachian Plant Materials Center located in Alderson, West Virginia. It is well adapted to the humid Eastern United States between USDA Plant Hardiness Zones 4 and 7. Due to the potential invasiveness of *Arrhenatherum elatius*, ‘Ruffner’ is recommended for use only within the Appalachian Region. Seed for ‘Ruffner’ will not be provided to commercial growers outside the Appalachian Region. Foundation seed is available from the plant materials center.

For more about  
*Arrhenatherum elatius* ssp. *elatius* and  
other plants and the Appalachian Plant  
Materials Center visit :

The PLANTS Web site  
<http://plants.usda.gov/>

The Plant Materials Program Web site  
<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Appalachian Plant  
Materials Center  
Old Prison Farm Road  
P. O. Box 390  
Alderson, WV 24910  
Tel. 304-445-3005  
Fax. 304-445-7049  
<http://www.wv.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/wvpmc.html>

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Appalachian Plant Materials Center

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United States Department of Agriculture



## ‘Ruffner’ Tall Oatgrass *Arrhenatherum elatius* ssp. *elatius*



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Appalachian Plant Materials Center products are  
**Helping People Help the Land**  
through better plants and science.

### **‘Ruffner’ Tall Oatgrass**

Tall oatgrass (*Arrhenatherum elatius* ssp. *elatius*) is a perennial bunch type cool season grass that grows in clumps, producing an open sod. It is frequently referred to as evergreen grass because of its pronounced cool season growth habit. Culms occur in large clumps three to five feet tall.

Tall oatgrass has long narrow leaf blades three-eighths to three-quarters of an inch wide and a fibrous root system. Due to its extensive root system, it is more drought tolerant than the other cool season grasses. It will persist on shallow, moderately infertile soils and be moderately productive.



‘Ruffner’ was released as a cultivar by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Appalachian Plant Materials Center in 2009. The release is named in recognition of Joseph Ruffner, who advocated the use of tall oatgrass as cool season forage on droughty, infertile, acid Appalachian soils.

### **Adaptation**

Tall oatgrass is native to Europe where it once was a significant grassland component. It is thought to have been introduced to the North American continent in the early 1800s. In North America, it has become widely naturalized in meadows, fields, open ground, waste places, and roadsides from Newfoundland to British Columbia, south to Georgia, Louisiana, New Mexico and west to California.

The primary use of tall oatgrass is as cool season forage for all classes of livestock. Because of its pronounced cool season growth habit and absence of endophytic toxins, tall oatgrass is an excellent replacement for tall fescue in extended season grazing systems.

Tall oatgrass is a useful conservation grass for soil stabilization on drastically disturbed lands, such as surface mined areas. It is especially useful as a nurse crop in mixes with other, more perennial grasses.

Whitetail deer find tall oatgrass to be highly palatable and will utilize it throughout the late fall and early winter. Tall oatgrass may be used in grass-legume blends for nesting, brood rearing, escape, and winter cover in upland wildlife and conservation plantings.

### **Establishment**

Tall oatgrass is easily established, adapted to excessively drained low fertility soils, and compatible with legumes. A clean,

firm, weed-free seedbed is recommended for good stands. Forage and erosion control seedings should be made in the very early spring as the seedlings are not winter hardy. A no-till type drill with press wheels is recommended for planting in no and minimum tillage situations; while tall oatgrass is easily established with common agricultural drills in conventional tillage situations. Tall oatgrass has 140,000 to 190,000 seeds per pound.



The recommended seeding rate for tall oatgrass is 7 to 12 pounds of seed per acre when planted with a drill. If broadcast seeded or planted for critical area treatment, double the seeding rate. Adjustments in seeding rate should be made when seeding in mixtures. Seeding depth should be 1/4 inch. Cultipacking after seeding is recommended in conventional tillage applications.

### **Management**

New plantings should not be grazed until the second growing season. The plants may be severely damaged by overgrazing especially in the seedling year.