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Sowing & Growing Black Oats

Black oats *(avena strigosa)* are sometimes known as Japanese or bristle oats. It's an annual species. They are similar in terms of their appearance to common oats but are physically larger in size and deeper rooting.

Black oats are generally used as a soil improving crop or green manure and may be especially useful if brassicas already form an important part of the rotation and subsequently cannot be used as a green manure.

It's quick to establish and competitive against weeds. It's also a grazable species in terms of livestock forage. Many species are not winter hardy as they are spring varieties in the UK.

When to sow: Black oats can be sown from early spring until early autumn.

Sowing Rates: 5 - 7.5 g/m2 - 20-30kg per acre - 50 - 75kg per ha.

Preparation: The most successful results come from sowing into a newly prepared seedbed. Aim to cultivate the top soil to about 5cm, with a light cultivator or discs. The finished seedbed should be fine but firm, with no clods. Several passes with a cultivator may be needed to achieve this.

Sowing: Broadcast or drill at 2-3 cm. Rolling after sowing is recommended.

Management: Many species are not winter hardy and may be killed off during a prolonged frost or cold snap over the winter.

The crop can be flailed off or grazed with livestock before incorporating. There are concerns the species may become a weed in cereal rotations if allowed to seed regularly.

The root exudates can inhibit the germination of other nearby species. This is known as allelopathy. While this can be a useful situation with regards to inhibiting weed seedlings, it may reduce the germination of the following crop, especially if it is a small seeded crop. To reduce this effect a period of 6 weeks should be left before sowing the next crop.

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