

Name

Alopecurus pratensis

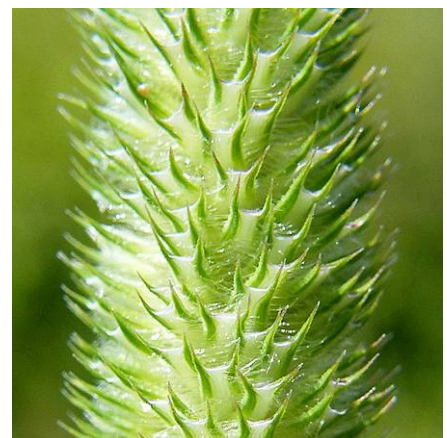
Meadow Foxtail



Habitat/Range A coarse grass of neutral grassland, persisting in improved swards. Generally found on moist, fertile soils (including arable fields), but avoiding waterlogged conditions and absent from light and dry soils. It also occurs on roadsides and woodland margins. Where this species is abundant, the possibilities of semi-improved or even unimproved grassland need to be considered, depending on its associates. However, this species does form very dense swards that allow few other grasses and very few herbaceous species to thrive with it, often resulting in low botanical diversity. This is a native species that occurs in suitable conditions throughout England and Wales, but not northern Scotland, western Ireland or in mountains.

Identification This is one of the earliest grasses to flower (April to June), and can be overlooked in mid and late-summer surveys, even where it may be the dominant grass species. It has two quite common relatives, marsh foxtail and black grass, but these are quite distinctive; meadow foxtail is more usually confused with timothy, but this is a coarser grass and later flowering (June to August) with superficially similar heads, much spikier to the touch (see below for spikelet comparison). The foxtail spikelet is soft, with a single long awn whereas timothy has rough bristly spikelets with twin horn-like projections, also arranged in cylindrical panicles.

Meadow foxtail ranges from c. 30 to 120 cm tall, with hairless leaves and stems and the sheaths smooth and cylindrical; the ligule is between 1 and 2.5 mm long and membranous with a slightly tattered upper edge.



Low diversity improved grassland



Semi-improved neutral grassland



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