

PMC Tests Hybrid Poplars for Fiber and Fuel

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The Aberdeen Plant Materials Center recently planted accessions of hybrid poplar currently being grown in Oregon and Washington to evaluate adaptability to the Upper Snake River Plain of Southeast Idaho. Hybrid poplar for fiber and fuel is becoming a large agroforestry business in Oregon, Washington, and northern Idaho. Presently, there is no commercial production of hybrid poplar in southeast Idaho or northern Utah.

Five accessions of hybrid poplar considered to be very productive and cold tolerant were obtained from Mount Jefferson Farms, Salem Oregon. These accessions were planted in a complete randomized block design with 'Imperial', 'Siouxland', 'Robust' and 'Canam' as standards of comparison. The cuttings were 9 inches long and approximately 3/4 inch in diameter. Weed barrier material was installed and then the cuttings were hand planted through the weed barrier so that only one bud was above ground. Allowing only one bud to be above ground forces the cutting to develop a single trunk which is preferred for wood production.

The purpose of the evaluation is to determine if the accessions currently being used in commercial production are adapted to the Upper Snake River Plains and northern Utah. Factors to be evaluated include survival, vigor, uniformity and growth rates. The planting will be evaluated annually for the next five years and then will be harvested 7-12 years after establishment to evaluate wood production.

The hybrid poplar accessions from Mount Jefferson Farms have also been planted at the Wiersma Dairy near Buhl and on the Richard Beesley Farm near Rexburg.

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