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SS-AGR-319

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Perennial Peanut: A Quick Reference[1]

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Figure 1. Perennial peanut -- also known as "Florida's Alfalfa" -- in bloom at Cone Farms in Madison County, Fla., in the summer of 2008.

Because of its high nutritive value, perennial peanut (Arachis glabrata) has been coined as the “Alfalfa Queen of the South.” In Florida perennial peanut is planted to approximately 30,000 acres with a noteworthy increment of close to 5,000 acres in the last 10 years.

Recommended cultivars for forage include 'Florigraze' and 'Arbrook'. Florigraze has a prostrate growth habit compared to Arbrook, which is more erect.

Because perennial peanut is not cold tolerant, its productivity and persistence is limited to areas of the southern coastal plains and peninsular Florida. Highest yields of perennial peanut occur in late spring and early summer; productivity declines in the fall.

Origin

Native to South America.

Use

Mostly for hay, but also for grazing and ornamental ground cover. Readily eaten by livestock (horses, beef and dairy cattle, sheep, goats, gestating sows, deer, rabbits, poultry, turkeys, and ostriches)

Nutritive Value

A high-quality forage legume, comparable to alfalfa in nutritive value. Plant parts analysis regardless of maturity has shown leaf and stem

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digestibility exceeding 60% and 50%, respectively. Crude protein ranges from 13 - 18% depending on maturity and leaf-to-stem ratio.

Figure 2. Perennial peanut in bloom at Cone Farms in Madison County, Fla., in the summer of 2008.

Description

1/2 - 1 1/2 feet tall, sod-forming growth, with extensive root/rhizome mass. Four leaflets per leaf. Bright yellow to orange flowers.

Adaptation

pH

Target pH is 6.0, but adapts to a range of 5.8 - 7.0. If soil is lower in pH, the soil should be limed to the target pH.

Soil

Sandy to sandy loam. Adapted to well drained sites.

Rainfall

High moisture and rain, more than 30 inches.

Management Practices

Planting Date

If no irrigation is used, February 1st to May (North Florida), December to May (Central Florida and South Florida). Planting can be extended to July if irrigation is available. Need to allow for rhizome development before a killing frost.

Planting Rate

80 - 100 bu/acre (assuming 1 bu = 1.25 cubic ft); if planting by weight 900 - 1200 lb/acre (1 bu= 11 to 15 lb, highly variable depending on how wet the sprigs are when dug and how much soil is on sprigs).

Inoculation of the rhizomes with the N-fixing bacteria (Rhizobium) is not necessary because it is passed with the planting material.

Planting Depth

1-2 inches. A common mistake is planting too deep.

Stubble Height

2-3 inches. The taller stubble will favor persistence.

Fertilization

For grazing or hay production, apply all of the phosphorus (30 lb P2O5/A) and potassium 60 lb K2O/A). For hay production, make an annual application of 20 - 30 lb sulfur/A. Unless the soil tested high or very high, after each hay harvest apply an additional 15 lb of P2O5 and 40 lb K2O per ton of hay removed.

Weed Control

(Check with county agent or Extension weed Specialist for updates and restrictions and always follow label directions).

Use Impose (imazapic) at a rate of 4 fl. oz/A to control crabgrass, nutsedges, johnsongrass, and several broadleaf weeds. Other products with the same active ingredient (like “Cadre”) cannot be legally applied.

Use Select Max (clethodim) to control annual and perennial grasses. However, Select Max will not control broadleaf weeds; other products with the same active ingredient cannot be legally applied. Select Max can be applied up to 32 fl. oz/A in a single treatment, but should not exceed a total of 64 fl. Oz/A/year.

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Use the product 2,4-D amine Weed Killer at 1pt/acre to control annual broadleaf species, such as Mexican tea (Jerusalem oak), pigweeds, Spanish needle, etc. Use of this herbicide requires observing a 30-day restriction when cutting hay.

NOTE: Products labeled for use in edible "peanut" (Cadre, Strongarm, Prowl, Valor, 2,4-DB) cannot be legally applied to perennial peanut.

For additional information, see EDIS Publication SSAGR261, Weed Control in Perennial Peanut, http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/WG216.

Pests and Control

Peanut stunt virus has been reported on some stands, but symptoms (leaf mottling and yield depressions) are rarely observed unless the plants are under stress (i.e., drought, soil nutrients). There is no known control at this time.

Additional Information

Blount, A.R., R.K. Sprenkel, R.N. Pittman, B.A. Smith, R.N. Morgan, W. Dankers, and T.M. Momol. 2006. Peanut stunt virus reported on perennial peanut in North Florida and Southern Georgia. EDIS publication #SS-AGR 37, http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/document_ag141. Department of Agronomy, University of Florida.

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