

Perennial Peanuts

Perennial peanut (*Arachis* species) is an effective and attractive landscape groundcover and cover crop for orchards. In other tropical and subtropical areas, perennial peanut has been used as a forage and fodder crop as well as a cover crop. It is extensively used for pastures in Florida, Central and South America, New Zealand, and Australia. It was nicknamed “Florida’s alfalfa” because its nutrient content as an animal feed is similar in quality to alfalfa’s. Perennial *Arachis* species are native to tropical South America and are wild relatives of the cultivated edible peanut, the annual *A. hypogaea*. *Arachis* pintio ‘Golden Glory’ (perennial peanut, pinto peanut) is becoming popular as a landscape groundcover that is particularly useful for sloping banks. It is established vegetatively, with stolons or stem cuttings either sown directly or container-grown and transplanted. *A. pinto* ‘Amarillo’ differs from ‘Golden Glory’ in that the leaf undersides are hairy, while the undersides of ‘Golden Glory’ leaves are smooth. The flowers of ‘Golden Glory’ have slightly shorter stalks. ‘Amarillo’ is established from seed (which is seasonally available in Hawaii) or vegetatively with stolons or cuttings, either sown directly or by container-grown transplants. *Arachis glabrata* (perennial peanut) is widely used in Florida as a forage and orchard cover. The leaves of this species are somewhat longer than those of *A. pinto*, and it produces fewer flowers. *A. glabrata* is propagated with stolons

Characteristics

Perennial peanut species and cultivars are crawling, non-twining, nitrogen-fixing legumes. The plants have four oval leaflets on each petiole and yellow, pea-like flowers. The seed is an underground nut, one per pod, which is not edible. The plants flower year-round, and flushes of flowers occur after wet periods following dry weather and after pruning.

Culture

Perennial peanut adapts well to a range of tropical environments from sea level to 5000 ft elevation. Irrigation or a reasonable amount of rainfall result in the best growth, and irrigation during establishment increases the stand and reduces the time to cover. Leaves drop during extended drought periods, and the foliage yellows during wet periods in poorly drained soils. These plants tolerate a range of soils, but grow best in sandy loam soils. They grow well in soils with pH

ranging from 5.5 to 7.5; soils with pH outside that range should be amended to adjust pH. Tolerance of soil salinity and airborne salt is moderate. Best growth is in full sun, but light to medium shade is tolerated. The plants do not climb trees or other tall, upright objects. Perennial peanut does not generally require application of nitrogen fertilizer. This legume “fixes” nitrogen from the air in the soil when the correct type of rhizobium bacteria (cowpea type) is present in the soil. Cowpea rhizobia are present in most tropical soils, but where they are not, use a commercial rhizobium inoculate on the propagation material (seed pods, seeds, or stolons) to insure nitrogen fixation. Alternatively, mix the inoculate or soil from an established stand of perennial peanut into propagation media. Or spread such soil lightly on new plantings. The plants form a tick mat of vegetation that “self mulches”, recycling nutrients as mown or fallen leaves decay.

Landscape uses

Once established, perennial peanut reduces soil erosion and shades out most weeds. It regenerates itself as seeds germinate when top-growth dies. As a living mulch, it protects the soil from being sealed by the impact of raindrops, helps retain moisture, improves soil structure, and benefits soil microorganisms. The perennial peanut has many uses in home and commercial landscapes. It makes an excellent bank or slope cover in full sun or light shade. The landscape texture of the plant is medium, contrasting nicely with fine-textured lawn grasses. Because of its regular and prolific flowering, the plant bed color is a mixture of green and yellow. The plant can be effectively used to cover either large or small areas. It can be planted among upright plants and will not climb them. It will compete with other ground-covers.



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