

Perennial Peanut, a good choice for your lawn.

Wouldn't it be great to have a lawn that hardly ever needed to be mowed or watered?

Perennial Peanut is an attractive, low-maintenance groundcover that blooms bright yellow flowers from spring to first-frost. This drought-tolerant, hardy perennial requires little or no supplemental water after it is established. In the drought conditions we are now facing, perennial peanut is an excellent choice as an alternative groundcover for lawns, golf courses and pastures.

It is the same genus as the peanuts that we eat, however perennial peanut produces only a very small pod and a tiny seed. Since this variety of peanut produces so few seeds, propagation of the plant is generally done by its rhizomes. These rhizomes (underground stems) are dug up and planted in another location.

Perennial Peanut was introduced into Florida in the 1930's and originated in South America. The plant is becoming popular by commercial companies as groundcover in many areas. The perennial is considered environmentally friendly because of its high tolerance to Florida's climate (even in drought conditions) and resistance to disease, insects and nematodes. In addition, because it is a legume, it requires no additional nitrogen fertilizer and has the ability to improve phosphorus availability in the soil that it lives in.

Ornamental perennial peanut is being tested in many areas, including the University of Florida, as a substitute for the water loving turf that has been used in the past. It grows in sunny and partially shaded areas. Because of its underground rhizomes it is also ideal for stabilizing soil on inclines, around culverts and other structures.

Studies by the University of Florida have shown that for best results, perennial peanut should be planted from January through March. However, even when planted during the other months, the plant survived and established itself. Planting in the first few months of the year will simply allow the peanut to establish roots faster. In addition, the study concluded that a 1.5 inch cutting height every 4 weeks is the ideal mowing schedule to allow the turf to flourish.

Perennial peanut grows best in full sun. It persists in a variety of well-drained soil types and does well in the deep sands of Florida. Land preparation should begin during summer prior to a winter planting to allow time for both chemical and mechanical weed control to be effective. If perennial broadleaf weeds or grasses persist, a herbicide such as glyphosate should be considered to eradicate this problem prior to first frost. (University of Florida)

Even though perennial peanut is not native to Florida, since it doesn't reproduce by seed, it cannot be carried and spread by animals or wind. Therefore, it is not considered "invasive" and can be managed in the area in which it is planted. Rhizome perennial peanut has several potential advantages in the managed landscape. As its name implies, perennial peanut is long-lived and doesn't require replanting once established.

The end result of choosing perennial peanut as groundcover for your lawn is savings in water, energy, dollars, and reduced impacts to the environment. It is not only beneficial to the environment since it requires no supplemental nitrogen or phosphorus fertilization or pest control, but it also is aesthetically pleasing, can be walked on, and has edible, peanut flavored flowers.

On April 11, 2008, Clell Ford, Lakes Manager and Corine Burgess, Natural Resources Specialist planted perennial peanut in a test plot near the Ag Center. To date, the tiny green shoots are beginning to spring up from the soil and soon the plot should be covered with the new foliage. Once established, the area should need little or no applied water. It should withstand the drought periods that would most likely kill a St. Augustine lawn growing in the sandy soil. And it won't need to be mowed nearly as often as the common turf grasses that need constant maintenance.

It is the hope of the Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District that more and more people will begin to utilize this plant for their lawns, golf courses, and pastures, thereby saving water for future generations. For more information on perennial peanut, please contact our office at (863) 402-6545. You can be on your way to a low-maintenance lawn and save money and water!