

# Perennial Peanut: A Quick Reference<sup>1</sup>

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Figure 1. Perennial peanut — also known as “Florida’s Alfalfa” — in bloom in north central Florida.

Credits: Yoana Newman, UF/IFAS

Because of its high nutritive value, perennial peanut (*Arachis glabrata*) has been coined the “Alfalfa Queen of the South.” In Florida, perennial peanut is planted on approximately 30,000 acres with a noteworthy increase 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. Two new cultivars have been released, ‘UF Tito’ and ‘UF Peace’, and they are in seed increase. ‘UF Tito’ is comparable in production to ‘Florigraze’ and has good vigor. ‘UF Peace’ is also comparable to ‘Florigraze’ but seems to be less competitive with common bermudagrass weeds than ‘UF Tito’.

Because perennial peanut is not cold tolerant, its productivity and persistence are 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

Perennial peanut is native to South America.

## Use

Perennial peanut is used mostly for hay, but also can be used for grazing and ornamental ground cover. It is readily eaten by livestock (horses, beef and dairy cattle, sheep, goats, gestating sows, deer, rabbits, poultry, turkeys, and ostriches).

## Nutritive Value

Perennial peanut is a high-quality forage legume and is comparable to alfalfa in nutritive value. Regardless of

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



Figure 2. Perennial peanut in bloom in north central Florida.  
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## Description

Perennial peanut grows from 1/2 to 1 1/2 feet tall, with sod-forming growth and extensive root/rhizome mass. It has four leaflets per leaf and bright yellow to orange flowers.

## Adaptation

### pH

Target pH for perennial peanut is 6.0, but it 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

Perennial peanut grows best in sandy to sandy loam soils, and is adapted to well-drained sites.

### Rainfall

Perennial peanut requires high moisture and more than 30 inches of rain.

## Management Practices

### Planting Date

If no irrigation is used, perennial peanut should be planted from February to May (North Florida) or from December to May (Central Florida and South Florida). Planting can be extended to July if irrigation is available. It is necessary to allow for rhizome development before a killing frost.

## Planting Rate

Planting rate of perennial peanut is 80–100 bu/acre (assuming 1 bu = 1.25 cubic ft); if planting by weight, this is 900–1,200 lb/acre (1 bu = 11–15 lb, and is highly variable depending on how wet the sprigs are when dug and how much soil is on the sprigs).

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

## Planting Depth

Perennial peanut should be planted to a depth of 1–2 inches. A common mistake is planting too deep.

## Stubble Height

Keep perennial peanut at a stubble height of 2–3 inches. The taller stubble will favor persistence.

## Fertilization

For grazing or hay production, apply all of the phosphorus (30 lb  $P_2O_5/A$ ) and potassium (60 lb  $K_2O/A$ ). 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  $P_2O_5$  and 40 lb  $K_2O$  per ton of hay removed.

## Weed Control

(Check with a 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 (such as Cadre) cannot be legally applied.

Use clethodim (Select Max, Shadow, others) to control annual and perennial grasses. However, clethodim will not control broadleaf weeds. Not all clethodim-containing products are labeled for perennial peanut, so consult the label prior to application.

Use the product 2,4-D amine Weed Killer at 1 pt/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 SS-AGR-261, *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, lack of soil nutrients, etc.). There is no known control at this time.

## Additional Information

For more information, please visit the Forages of Florida website at <http://agronomy.ifas.ufl.edu/ForagesofFlorida/index.php>.

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*. SS-AGR-37. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ag141>.

Ferrell, J., and B. Sellers. 2008. *Weed Control in Perennial Peanut*. SS-AGR-261. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences. <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wg216>.