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What's New? A Peanut Lawn!



Photo to be credited to David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: A good example of perennial peanuts can be seen on the bank in front of the UF-IFAS Leon County Extension office at 615 Paul Russell Road .

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Don't immediately start laughing and thinking that I'm pulling your leg. Peanuts have been found to make a perfectly acceptable lawn in many parts of the South.

This discovery comes about partly because environmentally concerned homeowners have been demanding a groundcover alternative to their high-maintenance grass lawns. The University of Florida and other research facilities throughout the South are trying to find some answers. Much research has been done with ornamental peanuts. It seems that they may be an excellent choice for an environmentally friendly, low-maintenance groundcover.

Ornamental peanut is a relative of the common peanut, *Arachis hypogaea*. Selections chosen for ornamental groundcovers reach six inches high and produce yellow flowers throughout the summer. Tops will die back after frost, but plants will come back reliably in the spring. The soil is not completely bare in the winter, either, as the brown stolons remain, protecting the soil from erosion.

Perennial peanuts are well-suited to the hot climate and sandy soils of Florida . Excellent results have been reported in the lower regions of other southeastern states, extending from southeast Texas to southeast North Carolina .

Once established, little or no maintenance is needed. Since they are legumes, they fix their own nitrogen, so little or no fertilizer is required. They are a popular choice for roadside plantings where no maintenance is done other than mowing. Height can be maintained down to one and one-half inches short if mowed every two to four weeks. Regular mowing also stimulates flowering. Weed control is important during the early establishment period. If broadleaf weeds are allowed to grow, they may shade the new plants and otherwise inhibit their growth. Weed control later will not be a major concern.

Ornamental peanuts make good sense for low-maintenance areas of the landscape. Many cities use them on berms and embankments where mowing is difficult or impossible. They make a useful turf when mowed every

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two to four weeks. In colder climates, ornamental peanuts can be used as an annual groundcover. The plants are also well-suited to container growing. Choose a good potting soil that will retain some water but is well drained.

Local garden centers sell perennial peanuts in pots. You can set the plants in the ground about three feet apart. Once a sizable patch of peanuts is established, getting more is easy. Since they spread by rhizomes, cutting off a few starts with roots will yield new plants. Tip cuttings can also be made and stuck in moist soil to root. Take tip cuttings while the plants are actively growing. They can be added to the landscape as soon as roots are well established. New plants may also be started from seed.

Ornamental peanuts prefer full sun but can also grow in partial shade. They just won't flower as well in partial shade.

Two different cultivars appear to be well-suited for use as low-maintenance groundcovers. Arblick and Ecoturf are used extensively. Other cultivars such as Florigraze and Arbrook grow taller and are used mostly as forage crops. Hay produced from these crops is similar in quality to alfalfa.

Ornamental peanuts are being grown as a groundcover on the bank in front of the University of Florida IFAS Extension at the Leon County Agriculture Center on 615 Paul Russell Road in Tallahassee.

At a Glance

Arachis glabrata

Say: a-RAK-is GLAB-rah-tuh

Family: Leguminosae (Pea)

Other names: Ornamental Peanut,

Perennial Peanut

Origin: South America

Zones: 8B-11

Light: Full sun to partial shade

Water Use Zone: Low to Moderate

Size: 6 inches tall and spreading

Soil: Any well-drained, not acid

Salt tolerance: Excellent

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