

## Perennial Peanut Puts On A Show



*Photo by David W. Marshall, UF-IFAS Leon County Extension: Perennial peanut makes a good substitute for lawngrasses in many situations.*

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Would you like a ground cover that can be grown in sun or part shade, does not require frequent mowing or fertilizing like most of our Florida grasses, is draught tolerant, and is resistant to insects, disease and nematodes? Perennial peanut could be your thing!

This groundcover was first brought into the United States from Brazil in 1936. It has been proven to grow successfully below the Florida-Georgia line because of our warm, temperate climate. You can walk on it, and here's a fun bonus, it has edible peanut flavored yellow flowers.

As long as your soil is well drained, perennial peanut should perform well. It tolerates the sandy coastal soils as well as the salt air. It can become yellow in highly alkaline soils, or soils with too much phosphorous content. As a legume, it fixes nitrogen to the soil, and does not need extra nitrogen fertilization. For this reason is it also a good cover crop.

In various parts of Florida, perennial peanut can be seen on medians, parking lot islands, along berms, slopes, and canal banks. With water management districts implementing water restrictions, perennial peanut is an excellent option for your yard. Once established, it handles draught well.

The sunnier the location, the more flowers you will have. At the master gardener demonstration garden on Paul Russell Road, we have planted perennial peanut in full sun at the sloped driveway entrance where it not only puts on a show, but keeps erosion in check. We have also planted it in a semi-shade location where it does it good job as a ground cover, but rarely blooms. If you decide to use perennial peanut in your landscape, be prepared for it to go brown in our colder winter months here in north Florida, just like most of our grasses. No worries though, it will green back up in the spring.

Perennial peanut can be purchased in 1 gallon pots at some of our local Tallahassee nurseries. The *Ecoturf* variety can also be purchased as sod, but like other types of sod, needs to be planted within a few days of being harvested before the roots dry out. Although it is draught tolerant when established, it does need water to get established, so if you plant it during the dry months of spring or the extreme heat of summer, supplemental watering will be necessary to help it survive and to establish a healthy root system.

It will benefit from weeding, especially while becoming established, occasional fertilization, and can be mowed to a height of 3 or 4 inches every 3 to 4 weeks during the growing season to encourage thicker coverage and more blooms.

If you're looking for an attractive, low maintenance addition to your landscape, give perennial peanut a try. It's a good performer.