



Photo by Joel Jackson

Mowing trials at the IFAS Research Station in Bartow indicated that Ecoturf performed best mowed at 1.5 inches every four weeks.

How does dark emerald green foliage

BY JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

That's right! Peanut turfgrass! I know it sounds weird. If you're looking for a low-growing ground cover for open areas, steep slopes, canal banks, tee slopes, and other hard-to-manage out-of-play areas, I have a plant for you!

How does dark emerald green foliage with bright yellow flowers sound? Want more flowers for a special occasion? Mow it a couple of weeks before the event.

Irrigation? None required, but it wouldn't mind a drink during a drought just like any living thing!

Fertilizer? How about a couple of pounds of SulPoMag around May. Nitrogen? It makes its own. It is a legume.

Pesticides? Maybe a little Fusilade for grass encroachment if necessary. Others? Well, it seems

that since 1936, when it was brought to Florida from Brazil, no insect, disease or nematode has taken a liking to it!

So, what are the drawbacks? Well, right now, you can't buy it commercially. It is slow to establish from sprigs, but it can be sodded!

Cold tolerance? According to the Polk County agronomists that have been working with the peanut for many years, it reacts similar to Tifway 419, so it is not an evergreen if it gets really cold! However, it is a survivor! It develops a tremendous rhizome system which makes it great for erosion control.

It isn't perfect. Nothing is! But, it bears watching as potential lawn cover requiring low management inputs as discussed in Gary Grigg's article elsewhere in this magazine.

On Aug. 18, the Polk County Extension Office

Found a peanut! Found A peanut!



Photo by Joel Jackson

The perennial peanut, *Arachis glabrata* alias Ecoturf! Lawn cover of the future?

with bright yellow flowers sound?

hosted a Field Day to extol the virtues and potential of the perennial peanut. The event was supported by the FTGA and the SWFWMD. Alan Puckett, FTGA board member and Ridge Chapter president represented the FTGA. Research for the event was funded by SWFWMD, Polk County Board of County Commissioners, The University of Florida involving the collaborative efforts of the departments of Agronomy, Environmental Horticulture, Agricultural Engineering and the Polk County Mined Lands Agricultural Research/Demonstration Project.

The audience was a cross section of the turf industry from superintendents and commercial lawn managers to sod producers. The agronomists were looking for an evaluation of commercial potential for the peanut from the audience, and I'd say the overall reaction was very positive.

Sections of the research plots are going to be open for bidding to sod growers so, it will be out there one of these days.

The history of the perennial peanut, pardon the pun, is "rooted" in forage crop research. Similar in nutrient value and digestibility to alfalfa, the peanut is better suited to southern climates.

The selection and breeding of peanut varieties over the past 58 years has yielded two low-growing types called Arblick and Ecoturf, which are now being explored as possible alternative, ecologically sound, lawn covers. Slides were shown at the Field Day that showed the use of the peanut as a lawn, right-of-way turf, and erosion control on road cuts.

The perennial peanut or rhizoma peanut (*Arachis glabrata*) is a member of the same genus as the eating peanut (*Arachis hypogea*).

Found a turfgrass just now!

Maintenance Cost Comparison between St. Augustinegrass and Perennial Peanut

Item	St. Augustine	Peanut
March: 16-4-8 w/minors @ 6.3 #/1,000 S.F.	\$23.76	
April 1 - November 1: Mow once/week = 30 times	750.00	
April 15 to October 15: Mow once/every 4 weeks		\$200.00
April: Spray w/Dursban @ 1.5 oz and Daconil @ 6 oz/1,000 S.F.	63.87	
May: SulPo Mag @ 2.3 #/1,000 S.F.		18.20
May: Milorganite @ 17 #/1,000 S.F.	35.40	
June: Spray w/Dursban & Daconil	63.87	
July: Fusilade @.74 oz/1,000 S.F.		64.04
August: Spray w/ Dursban & Daconil	63.87	
August: Spray w/Fusilade		64.04
September: 16-4-8 w/minors	23.76	
All year: Irrigation St. Augustine - None to Peanut	227.00	
November - March: Mow every 3 weeks = 7 times	175.00	
October 15 to April 15: Mow twice		50.00
Yearly Total	\$1,426.53	\$396.28

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However, it usually only produces a primitive single-celled, thin-shelled pod. Reproduction commercially by seed is not practical. The plant is best reproduced by digging up some rhizome material and planting it in a new location.

The foliage texture is more coarse than one usually associates with a lawn, because of its broadleaf character, but is a beautiful dark green, and the yellow flowers give it a perennial "meadow" look. The turf rarely grows above 4-6 inches, but performs best when mowed at 1.5 inches every 4-6 weeks (*See photo*).

Jim Stricker, Polk County extension agent, did a comparison of maintenance costs between a commercially-maintained

10,000-square-foot St. Augustine (Floritam) yard and one of equal size planted in perennial peanut. You can compare the physical and financial inputs in the table.

I think the folks over in Forage and Grazing have stumbled onto something that just might be a hit for us folks in Turf and Ornamental. It certainly won't hurt to check it out!

Peanuts! Get your dark green peanuts, right here! Peanuts!

Credits: Technical and historical information provided by Dr. E. C. French, Dr. G. M. Prine, and Mr. Jim Stricker.