

Plant Materials Fact Sheet



Rhizoma Perennial Peanut (*Arachis glabrata*) – The Perennial Peanut for Urban Conservation in Florida

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History of Rhizoma Perennial Peanut in the US

Rhizoma perennial peanut (*Arachis glabrata*) and several other perennial species of peanuts, which are all relatives of the nut producing peanut (*Arachis hypogaea*), were introduced to the United States from South America starting in the 1930s. These perennial species of peanuts were evaluated as potential forage crops. Most proved to be unsuited for Florida conditions, but several lines of rhizoma perennial peanut showed potential and are now commercially used for hay, silage, or pasture.

Florigraze rhizoma peanut hay field and roll of rhizoma peanut hay.



Rhizoma peanut has been called the “Florida’s alfalfa” because it has nutritional value for animals similar to alfalfa. Additionally, rhizoma perennial peanut has proved to be long-lived, drought tolerant, relatively disease and insect pest free, and does not require nitrogen fertilization.

The University of Florida (UF) and the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service Brooksville Plant Materials Center (PMC) released ‘Florigraze’ and ‘Arbrook’, two of the most successful forage cultivars of rhizoma perennial peanut. Currently there are over 26,000 acres of these cultivars planted in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Most of this acreage of rhizoma perennial peanut is used to produce high quality hay that sells for prices similar to alfalfa. It was estimated that in 2005 the value of rhizoma perennial peanut to the economy of the Gulf Coast states was around \$7 million.

Urban Uses for Rhizoma Perennial Peanut

Not all the rhizoma perennial peanut lines were suited for forage production because they were too low growing. Researchers realized this low growing characteristic would be an advantage if rhizoma perennial peanut were used in landscape settings as a groundcover or turf. In urban settings, the attributes of drought tolerance, pest resistance, and low fertility requirement translate into lower water, energy, dollars, and reduced impact on the environment compared to the turf grasses commonly used in Florida.



Brooksville 67 (left) and Brooksville 68 (right) ornamental or turf-type rhizoma perennial peanut developed at the Brooksville PMC.

Economic analysis by UF scientists indicates that the annual cost of 1000 sq feet of rhizoma perennial peanut is about half that of St. Augustinegrass. In fact, rhizoma perennial peanut was selected “Plant of the Year” by the Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association in 2002.

For the latest information on using rhizoma perennial peanut in urban settings go to:
http://www.gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/giam/plants_and_grasses/grasses_lawncare/perennial_peanut.html

The Confusion Over “Perennial Peanuts”

There is nothing like success to breed imitators. Most people are surprised to learn that peanuts can be a perennial plant because the peanut we enjoy eating is an annual. In reality, most of the 60+ species in the genus *Arachis* are perennial plants in the tropical areas of South America where they are native. The fact that there are quite a few perennial-type peanuts has led to considerable confusion for the public, particularly since all the original information in Florida gives “perennial peanut” as the common name for *Arachis glabrata*.

Arachis glabrata vs. Other Types of “Perennial Peanut”

One perennial species widely used as an ornamental in the tropics is *Arachis pintoi*, or the **pinto peanut**. This species of peanut has stolons or aboveground stems that run flat on the soil surface. These stolons will produce roots at the nodes (joints on the stems where leaves arise) and can be easily propagated from stem cuttings.

Pinto peanut with green stolon (at end of arrow).



A selection called ‘Golden Glory’ was developed in Hawaii in 1996 as a groundcover plant (http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/CoverCrops/perennial_peanut.asp). Golden Glory (sometimes mislabeled *Arachis repens*) has made its way to Florida in the nursery trade and has proved very popular, partly because it is easy to root from stem cuttings and thus easy and cheap to produce.

The pinto peanut has become confused in the nursery trade with the Florida-developed perennial peanut. Although used in more tropical areas of the world, there is no research information on how well pinto peanuts perform as a groundcover in subtropical Florida. Studies from around the world have shown that pinto peanuts are more susceptible to winter kill, spider mite damage, and nematode issues than *Arachis glabrata* (http://www.tropicalforages.info/key/Forages/Media/Html/Arachis_pintoi.htm).

How to Avoid Confusion

There are a couple of things consumers can do to make sure they get the plant they want.

- Do not just ask for “perennial peanut” or “ornamental peanut”; ask for a specific ornamental selection developed in Florida. Currently, the only selections of peanut recommended as a perennial groundcover or turf in Florida are: **Ecoturf, Arblick, Brooksville 67, and Brooksville 68.**
- If the plants do not have a selection name, simply looking for the scientific name, *Arachis glabrata*, is not enough. Much of the pinto peanut material available in Florida has been mislabeled as “*Arachis glabrata*” (see Ornamental Outlook, May 2008). Fortunately, *Arachis glabrata* is the only “perennial” peanut in the United States that has rhizomes or underground stems (see figure below). These rhizomes are the basis for the new and preferred common name “**rhizoma peanut**” or “**rhizoma perennial peanut**” for all types of *Arachis glabrata*. In fact, the rhizomes are the main method of propagating *Arachis glabrata* since this species produces little seed and does not root well from stem cuttings.



When grown in a pot, the rhizomes of *Arachis glabrata*, which are usually light tan in color, will wrap around the root ball giving the pot a root bound appearance.

References

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