

Kiss Your Grass Goodbye

Oh how I love to hang out at the Lakeshore Park in downtown Kissimmee where I look at the water and my favorite plant; perennial peanuts. If you have been to downtown Kissimmee in recent years you should have noticed a peanut like plant with yellow flowers growing as a groundcover in the medians. This beautiful groundcover is called perennial peanuts. If you did not notice this beautiful, dense lush plant, then I encourage you to make the lakefront be your next Sunday evening stroll. Let's discuss perennial peanut as a grass alternative.

According to UF/IFAS research; perennial peanut is adapted to the droughty, infertile sands of Florida. The peanut legume has the ability to fix nitrogen from the atmosphere; this means that perennial peanut requires no external nitrogen fertilizer. The perennial peanut is highly resistant to plant and soil pests. Can you image having a beautiful ground cover that you don't have to worry about chinch bugs in your St. Augustine or applying any irrigation? Using perennial peanut as a groundcover will remove all the stress that comes with your lawn grass. Lawn grasses are often plagued with problems such as diseases, insect pests, lack of water, and nematodes. In contrast, slugs and snails are the only known pests that affect perennial peanuts.

Perennial peanut prefers to grow in full sun, has a pH range of 5.5 to 7.5 soil, with good drainage, and it is low maintenance. This Florida-Friendly plant requires less resources to stay healthy compared to most lawn grasses. It also is important to note that proper site preparation is very crucial. Eradicate all weeds before establishing perennial peanuts. Plants can be established from sod or from plants grown in nursery containers. Container plants can be installed about 10 inches apart. If sod is used, it is important that the area is rolled for good soil contact. Irrigation is required the first few weeks for plant establishment; therefore if there is no irrigation system available, perennial peanut should be planted during the summer rainy season. After the plants are fully established, less water is required. Mowing will enhance the showiness of your new groundcover; mow canopy at a height of 4-5 inches every 8 to 10 weeks. Mowing is also the major means of weed control, mow weeds at the height of the canopy of the perennial peanut.

For more information on landscaping and other related horticulture topics, contact Grantly Ricketts with UF/IFAS Extension in Osceola County at 321-697-3000 or email gricketts@ufl.edu.