

PARTRIDGE PEA
Chamaecrista fasciculata (Michx.) Greene

Description: Partridge pea is a native, warm-season annual legume with numerous yellow flowers produced from July to September. Plants average 2 feet tall, but may exceed 4 feet on better soil. The leaves are pinnately compound and somewhat sensitive to the touch. The black, shiny, flattened seeds are produced in pods that pop open to scatter the seed when mature.

Uses: This seed is a choice food for quail, and is especially important for these birds because it does not deteriorate during the winter. It can also be used for landscape beautification and as a companion plant for other species that benefit from its nitrogen production.

Site adaptation: Adapted to most soil types, and is well adapted to coastal dune plantings. It grows best in full sun, but will tolerate light shade.

Cultural Specifications

Method of establishment: Seed.

Planting time: February to April.

Seedbed preparation: Prepare a clean, firm seedbed.

Planting rate and method: Broadcast or shallowly drill 4-6 grams per 100 square feet (4-6 lb/acre) scarified seed. To ensure nodulation, seed should be treated with EL (cowpea) inoculant before planting. Cultipacking after planting is recommended.

Fertilizer requirement: Partridge peas will grow on poor soils but respond well to fertilizer. Apply 7.5-11 oz per 100 square feet (200-300 lb/acre) of 0-20-20 or similar analysis at planting.

Companion plants: Partridge pea is compatible with many grass species. It can be too tall and competitive for planting with some wildflower species, especially when ample fertility is available. On less fertile sites, such as roadbanks, its growth rate may be reduced enough to allow planting with wildflowers such as black-eyed susan, purple coneflower, butterfly milkweed, and gayfeather.

Management

Disking/Burning Natural or planted stands of partridge peas usually reseed and do well for one to three years but will gradually decline without maintenance. Partridge peas respond well to controlled fire. Areas should be burned in February for best results. Disking will also keep stands in good condition and is probably a better method in areas where heavy stands of broomsedge occur. Disking should be done in late February to early March.

Mowing: Plants can be mowed in the spring before they are tall enough to be cut by the mower. The plants should not be mowed again until after seed matures in early to mid-October.

Seed production: Seed harvesting must be done after the seed pods have turned brown but before they shatter and expel the seed. Seed can be harvested by hand or using a combine. When using a combine, harvest should be delayed until a majority of the pods are in the appropriate growth stage. Some early maturing seed will be lost and late maturing seed will be immature, but the total harvest will be maximized.

Wildlife Considerations

Plant partridge peas in strips along field edges, fence rows, ditch banks, idle areas, selected patches around fields, and fire lane access roads.

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