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## Perennial Peanut Hay for Horses

### What is perennial peanut?

Perennial peanut is a warm-season legume grown in South Georgia, North Florida, and parts of South Alabama. Perennial peanut is largely grown for hay production, most of which is being marketed to the horse industry. Perennial peanut is established by vegetative progradation using underground stems that are dug from a nursery field. One acre of a well-established perennial peanut nursery should yield enough underground stems to plant 20-30 acres at a planting rate of 80 bushels per acre. Yield potential ranges from 3 to 5 tons dry matter per acre in a well-established stand and with favorable climatic conditions. Cost of establishment can vary from \$200-\$500 per acre.

### Is perennial peanut hay the same as “peanut hay”, or annual peanut hay?

Perennial peanut hay should not be confused with “peanut hay”, or annual peanut hay. “Peanut hay” is made from the residue after pod/seed harvest of the annual peanut. The leaves of the perennial peanut are similar to those of annual peanuts, however unlike annual peanuts, perennial peanut produces almost no seeds. Annual peanut hay should not be fed to horses under any circumstance as it is sandy, mostly stems, and dusty. However, perennial peanut hay has been found to be comparable to alfalfa in terms of nutritive quality, and was even given the nickname “Alfalfa of the South.” Due to the similarities between alfalfa and perennial peanut, a high value market exists for perennial peanut hay to horse owners in Alabama. This is because it is a more economical option compared to the expensive of purchasing and transporting alfalfa hay.



Photo Credit: Kim Mullenix

### Is perennial peanut safe to feed horses?

Not much is known about the nutritional value of perennial peanut for horses. Only two research studies have been conducted – Lieb et al., (1993) and Eckert (2008). In these studies, perennial peanut was found to be comparable to alfalfa in digestibility, crude protein, and fiber (Table 1). Several studies conducted at Georgia and Florida have found perennial peanut forage to be highly nutritious for goats, beef cattle, and dairy cattle. In the study by Lieb et al., (1993), voluntary intake by horses was greater for perennial peanut hay than for alfalfa hay. Perennial peanut hay has finer stem texture when compared to alfalfa hay making it more desirable for horses in terms of intake. Perennial peanut has a high nutritive value with in vitro digestibility percentages ranging from 60-70% and crude protein percentages ranging from 13 to 20%. Since perennial peanut is highly nutritious and very palatable to horses, it is best used as a supplemental feed (instead of being self-fed) to prevent overconsumption.

**Table 1.** Average composition of perennial peanut, Coastal bermudagrass, and Tifton 85 bermudagrass hays offered to horses (Eckert et al., 2010)

Dry Matter Basis	Perennial Peanut	Coastal Bermudagrass	Tifton 85 Bermudagrass
	-----%		
Dry Matter	93	94	93
Ash	8	6	6
Acid-detergent Fiber	11	10	8
Neutral-detergent Fiber	46	73	77
DE, Mcal/lb	2.14	1.98	1.87
Apparent Dry Matter Digestibility	65	53	52
Dry Matter Intake	1.8	1.8	1.7

**References:**

Lieb, S., E. A. Ott, and E. C. French. (1993). "Digestible nutrients and voluntary intake of rhizomal peanut, alfalfa, bermudagrass, and bahiagrass hays by equine". Page 98 *In Proc. 13th Equine Nutr. and Physio. Soc.*, Gainesville, FL.

Eckert, J. V. (2008). "Digestibility and nutrient retention of perennial peanut and bermudagrass hays for mature horses". Masters Thesis, Dept. of Animal Sciences. Gainesville: University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

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