Tropical and Sub-Tropical Legumes

Burgundy Bean* (Macroptilium atropurpureum)
A summer growing perennial legume suited to climates ranging from central QLD to central NSW. It is a drought tolerant, deep rooted plant that regenerates well from the high seed yields. It has a fair tolerance to cold conditions. Burgundy Bean* has good leaf coverage, thick stems and long runners. It can be an ideal alternative for Butterly Pea in Sub-Tropical regions because of its greater tolerance to colder temperatures.

Butterfly Pea (Clitoria ternatea)
Butterfly Pea is a vigorous, perennial plant with fine twinning stems. A high protein legume, it grows well in heavy clay soils with reasonable fertility and rainfall, showing remarkable persistence and can tolerate short-term waterlogging. It is susceptible to heavy grazing and therefore performs best in aspell-graing system that allows seed set. Being very palatable, with high digestibility, Butterfly Pea is excellent for tropical hay production.

Climbing Vine

Centro (Centro pubescens)
Centro is an annual that can root from the nodes under moist conditions. It is suited for higher rainfall and monsoon areas of North QLD and NT with an extended wet season. Centro regenerates aggressively and competes well with grasses. Bundy and Cowcoulde are fast growing cultivars that are heavier seeded, very palatable and good nitrogen fixers. Cowcoulde is suited to better soil types with a short wet season and tolerates some waterlogging and coastal flooding. Bundy is better suited to seasonal flooding conditions in the NT and a longer growing season. Bundy has smaller seeds, hairy stems and petioles.

Glycine (Neonotonia wightii)
Glycine is a deep-rooting perennial plant, producing long, slender, branched stems that root down at the nodes. It is suited to well drained, heavier, more fertile soils in cooler regions of the sub-tropics. It is more drought tolerant than Centro or Desmodium, but cannot tolerate very acid soils or waterlogging. Glycine also has a higher demand for nutrients than other tropical legumes. It combines well with tall grasses such as Panic.

Cooper
As it holds its leaf better in cool conditions, Cooper can be grown further inland, and has performed well on more fertile soils in higher rainfall sub-coastal areas of southern QLD. It has larger, coarser leaves and longer internodes, with a dull green colour.

Tinaroo
This variety has grown well on scrub soils of south eastern QLD. It gives the best autumn-winter growth as it flowers very late (mid-late). It is therefore used in more humid areas with a longer growing season. It has soft, thin leaves, which are bright green.

Greenleaf Desmodium (Desmodium intortum)
This perennial legume has a strong taproot and long trailing stems that can root at the nodes if in contact with moist soil. It also rarely persists permanently. It will tolerate lower temperatures than other tropical legumes and will grow on a wide range of soils, from light sands, loams and medium clays, but prefers moderate fertility and a pH above 5.0. It will not tolerate salinity, high levels of Al and Mn or heavy grazing. It is also susceptible to insect attack.

Leucaena (Leucaena leucocephala)
Leucaena is a deep-rooted and drought tolerant perennial that has the highest digestibility of all tropical legumes. It is best suited to well drained fertile soils of neutral to high pH. High Leucaena is commonly planted in rows with nitrogen loving grasses such as Panic or Rhodes Grass planted in the inter-rows. Its leaf is killed by frost, but its height protects it from ground frosts and it shoots again with warm weather. Young Leucaena leaves contain mimosine, which in abundance can cause loss of weight and hair. The main cultivars have been Peru and Cunningham with Cunningham being slightly more vigorous, but a new cultivar Tarramba (a more tree type) is more productive and will grow in cooler regions.

Lotononis (Lotononis bainesii)
Lotononis cv. M68 is the most frost resistant of all the commercially available tropical legumes and is well suited in most sub-tropical climates of Northern NSW and Southern QL. It is a soft, slender, smooth plant with low stems which root at the joints. Lotononis prefers sandy soils, but is found on heavier textured soils, while being tolerant of frost, poor drainage and acidity. It is very palatable and can require heavy grazing to persist.

Stoloniferous

Srirato (Macroptilium atropurpureum)
Srirato is a perennial, deep rooted legume that is suited to a wide range of drained, reasonable soils. It combines well with tall grasses, but not tolerant of constant heavy grazing, is also easily frosted and susceptible to leaf diseases (rust). The ‘Aztec’ variety is rust resistant. Srirato is highly palatable, grows well in moist sub-tropical and tropical regions and is a highly productive species able to fix large amounts of nitrogen and pass this on to any companion grasses. It grows best and is most productive in summer and early autumn.

Erect & Trailing

Climbing & Prostrate

Shrub/Tree

Prostrate

Sub-Woody Herb

Wynn Cassia (Cassia rotundifolia)
Wynn Cassia is a hardy, non-blooming, herbaceous, perennial or semi-regenerating legume that can tolerate heavy grazing. It has fast establishment, being a heavy seeder and has good nitrogen fixation qualities. Wynn Cassia is widely adapted to most regions and better suited to lighter, free draining soils as it cannot tolerate heavy soils or waterlogging. It is early-flowering and can flower at any time during the year, subsequently dropped large amounts of seed. Cassia leaf is damaged by frost, but the plant re-sprouts from surviving buds when warm conditions return. Wynn Cassia is not always recommended for fertile soils in higher rainfall districts as it tends to dominate grasses when grazed.

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