

Milgarra Blue Pea

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DESCRIPTION

Milgarra blue pea (*Clitoria ternatea* cv Milgarra, blue pea or butterfly pea) is an herbaceous perennial pasture legume with an erect base and fine twining stems which grow to 100-120 cm high. The twining stems tend to climb up companion grasses and shrubs or trees. Leaves have five to seven leaflets. Flowers are large and blue, or occasionally white.

Pods are flat 6-12 cm long and 0.7-1.2 cm wide. Seeds are olive, brown or black and are often mottled and are large for a pasture legume at 4-7 mm long and 3-4 mm wide (approximately 23 000 per kg).

Flowering can commence four to six weeks after sowing, and continues into the dry season provided adequate moisture is available.



CLIMATE AND SOILS

Blue pea is a native of the humid, lowland tropics of Africa, Asia and Central America, where it is recognised as being adapted to clay soils. In Africa, it often grows on seasonally-waterlogged black clays and in old cultivations.

Milgarra has grown well and persisted from Victoria River Research Station (635 mm rainfall) north. It is adapted to a wide range of soil types in the Northern Territory, including Emu red earth (VRD), Blain sand (Douglas Daly), Tippera clay loam (Douglas Daly, Katherine) yellow earth (Douglas Daly, Katherine, Mount Bunday Station), lithosol (Mount Bunday Station), Hotham red earth (Darwin) and black cracking clays (Beatrice Hill).

A naturalised line of blue pea grows on vacant land and in gardens around Darwin, and on shallow floodplains at Beatrice Hill.

Milgarra plants have survived and regrown after being burnt in the Top End of the NT.

ESTABLISHMENT

Seed should be sown at 3-6 kg/ha depending on seed bed preparation and proposed end use. For best results, seed should be sown into a well prepared seed bed, and covered as Milgarra has a large seed.

There is no evidence that a specific rhizobium inoculant is required. Milgarra will nodulate freely with cowpea inoculant or native soil rhizobia.

MANAGEMENT

Fertilisers

The type and rate of fertiliser to apply depends on soil type, but generally superphosphate at a rate of 100-250 kg/ha should be applied on virgin or previously unfertilised areas at sowing.

In subsequent years, further fertiliser should be applied as maintenance dressing of 50-100 kg/ha of super per year.

Applications of potassium, molybdenum or zinc fertilisers may be necessary on some soils.

If you are unsure of the fertiliser requirements, check with a Departmental Advisory Officer before sowing.

Yield

Dry matter yields of 3-5.5 t/ha have been recorded in pure stands of Milgarra in the Top End of the NT.

Seed yields of up to 800 kg/ha have been harvested from seed increase areas.

Grazing

Milgarra is extremely palatable to stock. It is susceptible to heavy grazing or regular cutting during the growing period of the wet season but can tolerate heavy grazing in the dry season.

Milgarra should not be grazed in the year of establishment before the plants have fully established and set seed.

Mixtures

Grasses which could be sown with Milgarra include Gayndah buffel, Nixon sabi grass, pangola grass, Jarra or Strickland finger grass, Guinea grass, silk sorghum and Kazungula setaria.

Hay

Good quality, palatable hay can be made from Milgarra. It is well accepted by stock. Blue pea is a shrub which tends to shed lower leaves as it grows, so the hay can be more stalky or stemmy than would be expected.



PESTS AND DISEASES

Grasshoppers and leaf-eating caterpillars, including loopers sometimes cause slight damage, but it is not economic to control them.

Developing pods can be attacked by Helicoverpa caterpillars or pod rucking bugs. Control of these pests may be required in seed crops.

WARNING

Pasture plants have the potential to become weeds in certain situations. To prevent that, ensure that pasture seeds and/or vegetative materials are not inadvertently transferred to adjacent properties or road sides.

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