

Green Manures No. TGM7

Greenleaf desmodium, *Desmodium intortum*

Green manures are plants which are grown mainly for the benefit of the soil. They can be grown as part of a rotation or in an intercropping system to build soil fertility, or as a cover crop to protect bare soil from erosion. Full details on the benefits and practice of using green manures can be found in HDRA's booklet 'Green manures/Cover crops'.

Desmodium intortum is also known as beggarlice.



Growing conditions

- Annual rainfall: Greenleaf desmodium prefers rainfall of 890mm and over. It is susceptible to extended dry periods.
- Altitude: Usually found above 500m and up to 2500m, but is widespread throughout the tropics and subtropics.
- Temperature: It grows best at to 30° C, warm. It does not tolerate frost.
- Soil type: It can grow in a soil type from pH 5.0 to 7.5. It tolerates light soils to clay loams. It will survive temporary waterlogging.

Nitrogen fixation

Greenleaf desmodium is a legume. This means that it has nodules on its roots which contain bacteria. These bacteria take nitrogen from the air. This is known as nitrogen fixation. The plant uses this to grow and when the legume is dug into the soil, the extra nitrogen is made available to the next crop.

Cultivation

Broadcast greenleaf desmodium at a rate of 1 to 3kg/ha. Gently rake in seeds to a maximum of 0.5cm deep.

Growth form

Greenleaf desmodium is a perennial shrub or trailing low bush.

Recommended application

Grow greenleaf desmodium as cover crop/green manure to suppress weeds, add fertility and control erosion in rotation with crops. Most varieties do not flower in the first year, so digging in can be done when convenient.

Human food

It is not suitable for human consumption.

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