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# Lespedeza: A Summer Legume for the Whole South

Article No. 34 on "Farm Facts Every Boy Should Know"

By B. L. MOSS

**L**ESPEDEZA or Japan clover, a native of Asia, was first found in this country in Georgia in 1846. Since that date it has become widely spread, and is now found growing naturally from central Texas eastward and northward to southern Kansas, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. In the cotton belt it is found practically everywhere, hardly a farm being without more or less of it.

The plant is strictly an annual, summer-growing legume, coming up in early spring and dying with the first autumn frosts. However, though it is an annual, it regularly reseeds itself each fall and remains indefinitely if allowed to make seed. Lespedeza, while often called Japan clover, is not a true clover, though it is a legume or nitrogen-gatherer. The plants grow from three to four inches high on thin hill land to twenty-four inches or even more on rich bottoms. Where stands are thin, lespedeza has a trailing habit of growth, but where the stands are thick the plants grow upright.

## Lespedeza a Great Summer Grazing Crop

**I**N THE South lespedeza possesses great value (1) as a summer grazing crop in permanent pastures; (2) as a hay crop; and (3) as a soil-improver.

Because of its adaptation to a very wide range of soil and climatic condi-

learning that on most lands of fair fertility within 150 miles of the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean, or on bottom lands practically anywhere in the Cotton Belt east of central Texas, lespedeza as a hay crop after oats is very dependable.

Good farmers well know that the oat crop is of doubtful profit unless followed by a legume hay crop; but with cowpeas and soy beans, the two crops most generally used for this purpose, there is considerable difficulty in breaking the stubble land and seeding the crop in time. June is a hot month, and breaking stubble land is hard on men and teams; moreover, it is one of the busiest months of all the year, and peas and beans are often left unplanted because it is physically impossible to get them in and properly attend to the rest of the crop at the same time.

One of the great advantages of lespedeza is that it obviates all this difficulty, since the seed are sowed among the oats in late winter or early spring. This advantage alone, where lespedeza succeeds, is enough to make us favor it over peas and beans; but it has still further advantages in that, instead of having to be cut at a certain stage in its growth, there is a period of four or five weeks when it may be cut, thus allowing us to wait in case weather conditions are not favorable. Furthermore, after a crop of lespedeza hay has been taken off, there are usually plenty of

A FOUR-YEAR ROTATION OF COTTON, CORN, OATS AND LESPEDEZA				
Year	First Field	Second Field	Third Field	Fourth Field
First.....	Cotton.....	Corn and cowpeas.	Oats, followed by lespedeza.....	Lespedeza
Second....	Corn and cowpeas.	Oats, followed by lespedeza.....	Lespedeza.....	Cotton
Third.....	Oats, followed by lespedeza.....	Lespedeza.....	Cotton.....	Corn and cowpeas
Fourth....	Lespedeza.....	Cotton.....	Corn and cowpeas.	Oats, followed by lespedeza

tions, its high feeding value, and its power to perpetuate itself when once sowed, lespedeza must be placed in the very front rank among Southern summer grazing crops. In fact, in probably 90 per cent of the Cotton Belt it is our belief that for a summer pasture there is nothing superior or even equal to a good stand of Bermuda and lespedeza in combination, and when to these two we add bur clover and white clover for winter and spring grazing, we have as near a year-round pasture as it is possible to get.

In starting such a pasture, the Bermuda should be planted first, preferably from April to July, in order that a good growth may be had before frost. Bur clover and white clover should then be seeded on the Bermuda sod in the fall, and then lespedeza sowed broadcast the following February or March. A light harrowing of the sod before scattering the seed, then leaving them uncovered, will be sufficient. Twelve or fifteen pounds of seed per acre, while possibly hardly enough to afford a perfect stand the first year, will furnish enough plants to thoroughly reseed the pasture for the year following.

## Lespedeza as a Hay Crop

**I**T IS only within recent years that the very great value of lespedeza as a hay crop after oats has begun to be appreciated. So far as we know, farmers in southeast Louisiana and southwest Mississippi were the first to use the crop for hay, but now the practice has spread over both these states, into east Texas, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, and into parts of Georgia and the Carolinas. Farmers who thought that lespedeza on their lands could not possibly make tall enough growth to mow (for hay are finding out their mistake and are

lespedeza seed left to reseed the land, and oats may be planted again without the trouble of again seeding the lespedeza the following spring.

A bushel or 25 pounds per acre of seed are usually sowed where a hay crop is wanted, the seeding being done the latter part of February or early in March. Some authorities say harrow the seed in with a section harrow, while others say this is unnecessary. Since such a harrowing will probably benefit the oats and at least will do no harm to the lespedeza, we are inclined to favor it.

## Lespedeza in Crop Rotations

**L**IKE cowpeas and velvet and soy beans, lespedeza fits admirably into crop rotations and cropping systems for Southern farmers. In the table on this page is shown a four-year rotation that is practiced, with cotton the first year, corn and cowpeas the second, oats and lespedeza the third, and lespedeza alone the fourth, going back to cotton again the fifth year. This of course may easily be shortened to a three-year rotation by following the oats and lespedeza with cotton the fourth year. Other rotations with lespedeza included will readily suggest themselves to the reader.

As a soil-builder lespedeza is equal to most of our other legumes, and there are farmers in Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi who will claim that it is superior to peas and beans for this purpose. Whether this be true or not, it is certain that because of the dense shade made lespedeza is one of the very best of summer cover crops. The facility with which it spreads to galled spots, stopping all washing, is still another point in its favor.

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