

Pueraria

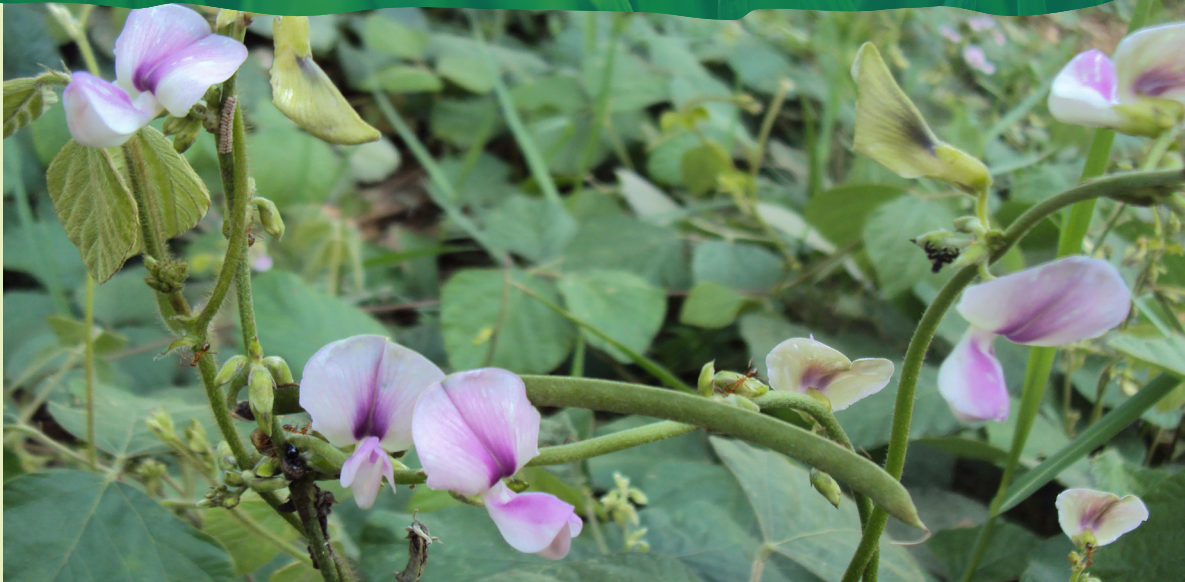


Photo credit: Vinayaraj

What is it?

Pueraria phaseoloides is also known as tropical kudzu and Japanese arrowroot. It is a perennial herb, which means that a plant will grow over more than one season, that can be grown as a cover crop and green mulch, and as fodder for animals. It is a climbing vine that can ramble over the ground or climb up other plants. When growing along the ground, the stems can root in place and create new plants. In the Pacific it is generally grown in plantations with palm, cocoa, coffee and citrus.

Pueraria is in the legume family, and therefore is good for adding nitrogen to soil. Bacteria work with the plant, to take nitrogen into the soil so it can then be used by other plants.

Its deep roots help with soil structure, spreading nitrogen across a wide area of soil, and holding soil firm against run-off and erosion.

Its extensive rooting habit means that it can tolerate short periods of dry, but Pueraria may need extra watering during drought or extended dry times.

How can I use it?

- Fodder for animals: Pueraria is a high-quality animal feed. Its seeds are high in protein, and the green plant is high in nutrients. It can also be cut and dried for hay.
- Cover crop: Pueraria can help maintain soil moisture and soil structure, as well as returning nitrogen to the soil.
- Green manure: Once established, Pueraria can be cut down and left to decompose in the field to add carbon and nutrients back into the soil.
- Pueraria roots can be dried and powdered and used in traditional medicine. Pueraria is traditionally used to treat symptoms of menopause. It may also be good for bone health. There is some evidence it encourages antioxidant activity.
- Pueraria fibre can be used for making rope.

How can I grow it?

If planting from seeds, soak the seeds for 12 hours in warm water and plant into pots. Thin out seedlings as they grow. Plant out after a few weeks.

Pueraria can also grow easily from cuttings, or it is sometimes direct seeded, meaning it can be grown from seeds planted directly into the ground.

Plant in a sunny position in well-drained soil.

When Pueraria rambles on the ground, roots can sprout from stems being in contact with the ground, and new plants can grow from this sprouting. These can be transplanted or left in place for further, thicker growth.

Care needs to be taken with Pueraria, as some varieties are invasive, and can be a problem in forest areas, where there is the potential that plants will spread rapidly and climb over and smother native vegetation.

