

HORSES GO “NUTS” FOR PERENNIAL PEANUT HAY
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Hey Horses! There’s a new hay on the menu. Perennial peanut, a high quality legume hay, equivalent to alfalfa, has been developed and tested at the University of Florida and is now becoming commercially available to horse owners in the state. The University of Florida’s Agronomy Department is always searching for new forages suitable for Florida’s environment. Perennial peanut is a legume forage with large, oval leaves and beautiful orange/yellow flowers. Perennial peanut, also call forage peanut, looks similar to the annual peanut plant but does not produce the peanuts that humans love to munch on.

The big question is would horses eat it? And, could horse owners be convinced to feed it? The acceptability and utilization of perennial peanut hay by horses has been studied by the Equine Program group in the Animal Science Department at the University of Florida. It established early on that horses love to eat perennial peanut.

Perennial peanut hay of the Florigraze variety was compared to alfalfa, Bermuda grass and Bahia grass hays for voluntary intake and nutrient utilization by mature Thoroughbred geldings. The alfalfa used was top quality commercial hay from New Mexico and the other hays were commercially produced in Florida. Only mineral supplements and no grain were fed with the hays. As you can see in the following table, the horses ate and gained the most on the perennial peanut hay.

**Comparative acceptability and nutrient utilization by horses of
 Perennial peanut, Alfalfa, Bermuda grass and Bahia grass hays**

Categories	Peanut	Alfalfa	Bermuda	Bahia
Daily voluntary intake, lbs/1000 horse	32	24	28	15
Body weight gain/loss over 26 days, lbs/horse	+ 31	+ 9	+ 10	- 75
% Crude Protein	16	20	14	07
% Comparative Value to the Alfalfa (based on digestible energy)	90	100	70	53

Mineral levels of calcium and phosphorus in perennial peanut are similar to alfalfa.

Already, horse people are using a significant amount of perennial peanut in their feeding programs. Reactions are very positive and these owners have some useful management hints. Reports indicate that horses love to eat it from the very start and “do well” on it. One large breeding farm switched from alfalfa hay to perennial peanut hay years ago and found that the horses preferred perennial peanut over alfalfa and had no digestive disturbances. Today, this farm prefers to use nothing but perennial peanut hay; feeding it by the traditional method of individual flakes to each horse. Horse owners accustomed to feeding grass hays are tying perennial peanut, because of its greater value. Full feeding perennial peanut hay to lactating mares and growing horses has been done by some owners with great results. The quality of the perennial peanut hay currently being bought is generally good to excellent. In general, it appears that perennial peanut hay should be treated similar to alfalfa in feeding programs and that the grain portion of the diet could be formulated with lower levels of protein and calcium; as is usual for other legume hay based diets.