

TICK TREFOIL

Rensonii

Desmodium rensonii

Fabaceae

ECHO® PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

Origin

The origin of this species of *Desmodium* is not clear but from its growing preferences it must have been from a moist, humid area with rainfall no less than 120 cm/year. It is now a familiar forage legume in Indo-China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Central and South America at low elevations.

Uses

Desmodium rensonii is used most often as a fodder tree in a system of hedgerows and alley cropping. As a legume, it produces nitrogen-rich foliage (crude protein- 20-22%), that is fed to goats, cattle, sheep, rabbits, pigs and guinea pigs, as well as serving as mulch and green manure. It is highly preferred in the SALT (Sloping Agricultural Land Technology) method of farming to control erosion while producing large amounts of foliage for animal food.

Cultivation

The hard, small seeds germinate after 3-4 days in a variety of well-drained soils. Young, slow-growing seedlings are stressed by weed competition but mature trees will shade out weeds. Once each month, the abundant foliage should be cut and a stump of at least 1 m should be left to branch out again for the next cutting. The leaves are carried to livestock rather than let them graze and destroy the crops planted between the hedgerows. The farmer must continue to cut the foliage and can use the extra for piling up around plants for mulch or turn under for green manure. Up to 50% of goats' diets can be leaves from the Tick Trefoil trees.

Harvesting and Seed Production

The Tick Trefoil plant will produce seeds at seven months but reaches full production of seed at two years. When 80% of the field's plants have seed pods that have turned brown, it is best to hand strip the brown pods that hang down under the branches. Leave green pods to ripen for next picking and do not injure the foliage or branches when harvesting. Dry the pods in the sun for 2-3 days, pound with a mortar and pestle and winnow to separate debris. Store seeds at 10-12% moisture for two years in airtight containers, away from the sun. In fertile soil, a double hedgerow of trees planted 10 m. apart will produce 3.5 kg seed per year.

Pests and Diseases

Young plants are subject to defoliation by insects but mature plants can resist these pests.

Cooking and Nutrition

The Tick Trefoil plant is not used for human consumption but its nitrogen-rich foliage is fed to livestock and the seeds are particularly good for chickens

References

<https://www.winrock.org/factnet-a-lasting-impact/agroforestry-for-the-pacific-technologies-fact-sheets/community-based-tree-seed-production-with-desmodium-rensonii-and-flemingia-macrophylla/>