

## Goat Pastures Sericea Lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*)

<http://articles.extension.org/pages/19420/goat-pastures-sericea-lespedeza>



Sericea is widely adapted in the Southeast but is best suited for use as a pasture plant on medium- to well-drained clay, sandy loam soils and deep sands, as well as eroded areas, from southern Ohio to central Alabama and from eastern Oklahoma to the Atlantic coast. It also does well on shallow soils with drainage restrictions. Sericea lespedeza will tolerate lower pH (more acid) soils than clover but will definitely respond to lime applications on acid soils. Its ability to grow in poor, droughty soil makes sericea a popular choice for stabilizing critical areas, such as road banks and mine reclamation sites. However, it can also fill a niche on many livestock farms in areas where most pastures are dominated by cool season forage crops, especially on sites where other forage crops are not well adapted.

Sericea lespedeza is an erect, deep-rooted perennial legume that persists for many years, especially on low-maintenance areas. It usually grows only 6 to 12 inches the first year. It does not spread by rhizomes and stolons. The first growth in the spring arises from crown buds. New growth after cutting or

grazing arises from buds on the stubble and not the crown. General growth period is April to November 1. Peak growth period is June, July and August, with annual yield of 2 to 3 tons per acre. Sericea lespedeza does not self-destruct if not used because it produces a seed crop in late summer and fall.

Sericea lespedeza is preferably seeded alone and does not compete well with other plants. It may be overseeded with winter annuals if carefully managed. The main winter annual legume sometimes grown with sericea lespedeza is crimson clover. Seeding crimson clover in the fall will provide grazing in the spring and not damage the lespedeza if the clover is grazed closely in April and May. The quality of sericea lespedeza is moderate quality - 50 to 55 percent digestible and 12-percent to 16-percent crude protein. But forage quality of improved varieties is better than most warm season perennial grasses.

Goats graze the leaves and the tender and terminal stems and will consume the plant at all stages of growth. If allowed to reach 18- to 24-inches growth or more, it becomes woody, stemmy and high in fiber. Tannins, compounds that naturally occur in sericea lespedeza and some other forage plants, reduce the intake and digestibility of fresh forage. Consequently, forage-type sericea lespedeza varieties are often categorized as being high-tannin or low-tannin types. Serala and Serala 76 are improved varieties that have smaller stems and higher forage quality than the older, common varieties. Serela 76 was released by Auburn University because of its resistance to nematodes. Interstate 76 is also an Auburn variety. It was selected because of its resistance to pests and erosion control potential on roadsides and areas that erode easily. AU-Lotan and AU-Donnelly are more recent Auburn releases developed with low tannins for improved palatability and digestibility. AU Grazer, another variety developed by Auburn especially for grazing, has intermediate tannin levels.

Up to a certain level in the daily ration, tannins are known to increase the amount of protein bypassing the rumen, thus making the goats use their feed more efficiently. In addition, there has been some recent success in reducing barberpole fecal egg counts and perhaps the adult worm numbers by feeding sericea lespedeza, either fresh or as hay. Animals prefer the young plants, but it should not be grazed until it is at least 4 to 6 inches in height to preserve the stand. Whether goats need to graze sericea lespedeza on a daily basis or only at regular intervals for tannins to have a beneficial effect on parasite loads has not yet been fully determined.