

United States Department of Agriculture

Soil Conservation Service

Program Aid Number 1380

# 'Lancer' perennial pea



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'Lancer' perennial pea, *Lathyrus latifolius* L., is an attractive nitrogen-fixing herb. It is compatible with other legumes and grasses and is well suited for use in seed mixtures to establish cover in critically eroding areas. It can be planted along roadsides for beautification and provides cover and some food for wildlife. Perennial pea is a deep-rooted legume from Europe, where it was used as an ornamental around homes and farmsteads.

Lancer was released in June 1984 by the United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, and the Michigan Department of Transportation.

### Description

Lancer has compound leaves with two lanceolate leaflets that are 1.5 to 3.5 inches long. The long, broadly winged stems have tendrils that give it climbing ability. The green stems and foliage form a thick, viny mat that measures 2 to 3 feet high.

The plants bloom continuously for 6 weeks during the summer. The flowers range from white to deep purple and are borne on racemes of up to 10 blossoms each. The seeds are large and are produced in pods that are 2.5 to 3.5 inches long.

Compared to other varieties of perennial pea, Lancer grows more upright, has superior seedling vigor, and is a good seed producer. It also has a more uniform distribution of colors than other perennial peas evaluated. Although downy mildew has been observed on the leaves, Lancer is not susceptible to any serious diseases or insect problems.

### Establishment

Lancer should be established as part of a seed mixture that includes perennial grasses, other legumes, or both. Other components of the mixture may be the principal soil-stabilizing plants; and Lancer can be included to

provide color only, or it can be one of the principal cover plants. If included in the mixture to provide color only, the recommended seeding rate of Lancer is 10 pounds per acre; otherwise it is 15 pounds per acre. Do not seed alone because Lancer will not provide soil cover quickly. Other mixture components will do this.

As can other legumes, Lancer can be direct seeded with standard planting techniques. If the seed is drilled, it should be placed in a firm seedbed that is 0.5 to 1 inch deep. The planting site should be rolled or cultipacked before and after seeding. If the site is unsuitable for equipment use, the seed and fertilizer can be applied with special hydroseeding equipment or broadcast and raked into the soil by hand. All plantings should be mulched with 1.5 to 2 tons of straw per acre.

Lancer can be planted in early spring or in the fall before September 15. Fertilizer and lime should be applied according to needs determined by a soil test. The fertility requirements for Lancer are similar to those for other legumes, such as alfalfa. Seed should be



Roadside planting of Lancer.



Lancer on steep road bank

inoculated with the proper nitrogen-fixing bacteria just before planting.

Careful timing is necessary to obtain maximum yields when harvesting seed, because the seed pods do not all mature at the same time and the pods shatter when fully ripe. Seed yields average 165 pounds per acre, with about 8,000 seeds per pound.

### Adaptation

Field plantings have shown that Lancer is adapted to the Great Lakes region and the Northeastern United States. It is also likely that adaptation extends to Virginia, Missouri, and Kansas (see map). Lancer grows well in silt loam to fine sandy soils that have fair to good drainage. It is not suited to wet soils and is difficult to establish in sands.

### Availability

The Soil Conservation Service maintains breeder seed at the Rose Lake Plant Materials Center, 7472 Stoll Road, East Lansing, Michigan 48823.

For information on where to purchase Lancer perennial pea and details on how and where to plant it, contact your local Soil Conservation Service office. It is listed in the telephone directory under United States Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. Assistance is available without regard to age, race, creed, color, sex, handicap, or national origin.

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