

**SERICEA  
LESPEDEZA**  
*Lespedeza cuneata* (Dum.  
Cours.) G. Don  
Plant Symbol = LECU

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials  
Program



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**Caution: This plant may become highly invasive. Check for its status in your area.**

#### Alternate Names

Chinese lespedeza

#### Uses

Sericea lespedeza is used for hay, pasture, erosion control, cover crops, and wildlife food and cover.

#### Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

#### Weediness

This plant may become weedy or invasive in some regions or habitats and may displace desirable vegetation if not properly managed. Please consult with your local NRCS Field Office, Cooperative Extension Service office, or state natural resource or

agriculture department regarding its status and use. Weed information is also available from the PLANTS Web site at [plants.usda.gov](http://plants.usda.gov).

#### Description

Sericea lespedeza has light green stems 3-5 feet tall having few branches. New growth arises from the crown each year. A plant two or three years old may have 20-30 stems. New shoots are succulent and tender until they reach 12 to 18 inches, when they become woody and fibrous. Roots are widely branched and penetrate the soil more than three feet. A high percentage of seeds produced may be hard seed. These seeds, which may comprise 20%-30% of the seed lot need to be scarified to germinate. There are approximately 372,000 seeds per pound of unscarified and 335,000 seeds per pound of the scarified seed.

#### Adaptation and Distribution

Sericea lespedeza is adapted to the southern portions of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and central New Jersey southward into the southeast states. It is best suited to areas receiving at least 30 inches of rainfall annually. It can survive short periods of subzero temperatures when fully established, but prolonged freezing will contribute to winter kill. It grows best on deep, well-drained, medium to coarse textured soils. Sericea lespedeza is tolerant of low pH (4.5) and infertile soils. Optimum pH range is 6.0-6.5. On some sites it has been very competitive and hindered the re-colonization of native species.

For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

#### Establishment

Sericea lespedeza should be seeded in the early spring (two to three weeks before normal corn planting time) in a firm seedbed free of weed pressures. Because stand establishment is slow, it is best seeded with a quick establishing grass such as weeping lovegrass, ryegrass, or tall fescue. Seed may be drilled or broadcast. Use 10-12 pounds per acre if establishing hulled and scarified seed with a drill; 15-20 pounds per acre if establishing unhulled or unscarified seed with a drill. Broadcast hulled and scarified seed at 30 pounds per acre in the spring and 45 pounds per acre in the fall. Inoculate the seed with the appropriate rhizobia bacteria developed for lespedeza species so the plants will fix nitrogen.

Plant Materials <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/>>

Plant Fact Sheet/Guide Coordination Page <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/pfs.html>>

National Plant Data Center <<http://npdc.usda.gov/>>

Seedings for seed production should be drilled with hulled and scarified seed at 10-12 pounds per acre on 9-12 inch drill widths.

### **Management**

Sericea lespedeza responds to regular applications of lime and fertilizer according to soil test recommendations. It will tolerate pH as low as 4.5 on roadsides and minespoils, but will make optimum growth for forage and seed production at pH 6.0-6.5. Since it is a legume, nitrogen is not necessary. However phosphorus and potassium may need to be applied every two to three years. Fertility helps maintain stand density and palatability. Sericea lespedeza may be mowed or grazed frequently if well fertilized. Graze or cut when plants are 12 inches tall. Leave a three inch growth after each harvest. On critically eroding areas, mow at least once every two years if competing vegetation is to be controlled.

### **Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

The NRCS Quicksand Plant Materials Center in Kentucky released 'Appalow' as a prostrate cultivar for roadside stabilization in 1978. Foundation seed is available from the Alderson, West Virginia Plant Materials Center.

Sericea lespedeza was first introduced to the commercial seed market as 'Arlington', an informal release from the USDA Nursery in Arlington, Virginia. Auburn University has released many formally released cultivars: 'Serala' as a fine-stemmed forage cultivar in 1965, 'Interstate' as a dense growth cultivar for roadside stabilization in 1969, 'Serala 76' and 'Interstate 76' as root knot nematode resistant cultivars in 1978, 'AU Lotan' as a low tannin forage cultivar in 1980, AU Donnelly as a low tannin forage cultivar in 1987, and AU Grazer as a grazing cultivar in 1997

### **Control**

Please contact your local agricultural extension specialist or county weed specialist to learn what works best in your area and how to use it safely. Always read label and safety instructions for each control method. Trade names and control measures appear in this document only to provide specific information. USDA, NRCS does not guarantee or warranty the products and control methods named, and other products may be equally effective.

### **Prepared By:**

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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