PLANTS FOR CONSERVATION IN THE NORTHEAST
USDA - SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
TSC - Upper Darby, Pa.

CONSERVATION PLANT SHEET

No. 27

FLATPEA
(Lathyrus sylvestris L.)

USES: Flatpea is an erosion control plant that provides a thick mat of vegetative cover, fixes nitrogen in the soil, and can be maintained with a minimum of management. Useful for roadbanks, dams, borrow areas, gravel pits, surface minespoil, and industrial waste areas.

Ideal for logging roads and utility rights-of-way as it will restrict the invasion of many woody species.

Provides good cover for wildlife, such as deer, and small game species. Pigeons, doves, grouse, and turkey are known to utilize the seed.

FLATPEA

DESCRIPTION: This is a climbing, perennial, herbaceous legume that will attain a height of 6 to 7 feet if support is available. Normally, it will have a height of 18 to 30 inches, and forms a dense vegetative mat. The stems and petioles have leaf-like appendages (winged). The leaf is composed of two long, narrow leaflets, with parallel veins, and bears a tendril that extends from the center of the leaf. Flowers are deep pink to reddish brown. Seeds are round and black and borne in a pod 2 to 3 inches long.

Flat pea closely resembles the perennial sweetpea, and is related to the common garden sweetpea.

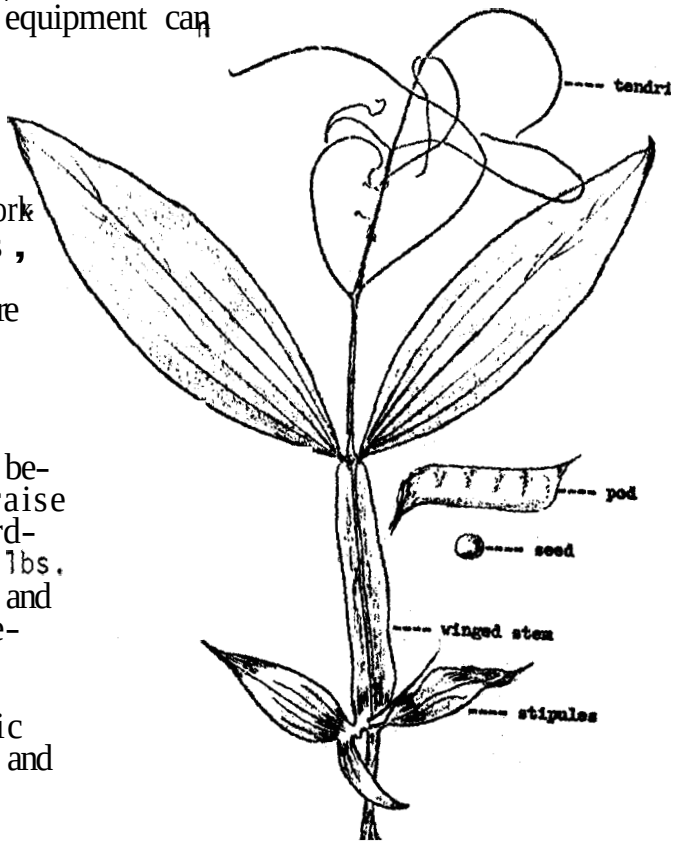
ADAPTATION: Flatpea is adapted throughout the Northeast, and to a wide variety of soil conditions. It is drought tolerant, and does well on low fertility sites as sands, gravels, and soils from acid sandstones. It is not adapted to wet sites, but will grow on somewhat poorly drained soils. It will tolerate moderate shade and a minor degree of flooding.

VARIETIES: 'Lathco' is the only named variety. It was developed by the Soil Conservation Service at the Big Flats Plant Materials Center, Big Flats, N.Y.

SOURCES: Limited supplies available in 1974, but should be readily available in 1975. Present seed production is in Pennsylvania and New York.

FLATPEA

ESTABLISHMENT: Prepare a good seedbed where equipment can be used to scarify the soil. Seed should be drilled or band seeded to a depth of 1 to 1 and 1/2 inches. On rough sites where normal seeding equipment can not be used, some method of soil scarification is strongly recommended. A tool bar with shovels or ripper teeth works well. On steeper slopes, heavy logging chains with welded spikes will work on uneven terrain. On such sites, broadcast the seed and work into the soil by light dragging. Where possible a light mulch properly anchored will give assurance of a stand.



Lime is essential if the soil is below a pH of 5.0. It is best to raise pH to 6.0 to 6.5 Fertilize according to a soil test, or apply 400 lbs. of 10-20-20 per acre. Work lime and fertiliter into the soil when preparing the seed bed.

Inoculate the seed with a specific inoculant for Lathyrus (sweetpea and peas). If hydrosee e, use four times the recommended amount.

Seeding rate and mixtures: A rate of 30 to 40 lbs. of flatpea in a mixture with 8 to 10 lbs. of ryegrass or 10 to 15 lbs. of tall fescue per acre. Flatpea is slow to germinate and grasses are needed to provide quick cover.

Early spring seedings in April and May are best. June seedings are less desirable. Grass seedings as above may be overseeded with flatpea in November through March. Flatpea is usually not winter hardy if seeded in mid- or late summer. Therefore, dormant seedings are recommended.

Mulch with straw at the rate of 1 and 1/2 tons per acre on all critical sites and tie down straw in place. A mulch anchoring tool is suitable.

MANAGEMENT: Little or none is required. Remove woody vegetation if site is invaded. Mowing is acceptable once the stand is well established. Mow after full bloom at a 6-inch minimum height.